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THE MATCHMAKER

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THE MATCHMAKER

A NOVEL

BY

L. B. WALFORD

AUTHOR OF

"MR. SMITH," "THE BABY'S GRANDMOTHER,"

"THE ONE GOOD GUEST,"

&c., &c.

Human life is nought but error.—*Schiller.*

NEW YORK

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

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CONTENTS.

Chapter		Page
I.	Penelope	1
II.	An Episode	12
III.	Arriving at Sunset	19
IV.	Lady Carnoustie diagnoses Penelope	29
V.	Master and Mistress	35
VI.	Penelope wins Favour	44
VII.	Mina vindicates Herself	54
VIII.	Up the Burnside	64
IX.	A Jilt	73
X.	Lord Carnoustie at Play	81
XI.	Penelope beamed upon Him	90
XII.	Fear	99
XIII.	'Setting out for the Kirk'	107
XIV.	Lord Carnoustie's Show Man	115
XV.	An Explanation under an Umbrella	120
XVI.	An Important Invalid	128
XVII.	Lord Carnoustie and his Factor	137
XVIII.	'You want to poach upon my Preserve'	145
XIX.	Mina's Loss upon the Moor	154
XX.	'Won't you have a Nice Bright Sixpence, Tosh?'	164
XXI.	Lady Carnoustie's Dilemma	172
XXII.	Penelope is left alone to gather Driftwood	182
XXIII.	'Let Every Herring hang by its ain Tail!'	191
XXIV.	'A Pink Gingham Frock'	202
XXV.	'How if it were Love?'	209
XXVI.	'What happened here,' she said, 'Last Night?'	217

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Chapter		Page
XXVII.	A Wrestle for the Mastery	224
XXVIII.	'What signifies a Lie, more or less?'	233
XXIX.	Torquil Macalister takes the Hint	241
XXX.	A Hand on a Dog's Head	250
XXXI.	Tosh brings a Piece of Information	259
XXXII.	'A Week is a Confoundedly Long Time'	271
XXXIII.	Fashionable Arrivals	277
XXXIV.	'Can Bob——?'	286
XXXV.	'I've known a Lassie marry for a Peat-Stack'	295
XXXVI.	'Did you notice Mr. Redwood's Face?'	304
XXXVII.	An Accident 'À propos'	314
XXXVIII.	Bob, by Himself	324
XXXIX.	'Don't you ever Spoon?'	331
XL.	Miss Marianne Soutter plays Cribbage at last	342
XLI.	Her Dear Little Singing Man	352
XLII.	'He kicked the French Novel off the Sofa'	360
XLIII.	Tosh loses a Letter	368
XLIV.	The Postmark was 'Lochaber'	377
XLV.	'They will find Torquil Macalister there To-Morrow'	389
XLVI.	A Terrible Meeting Place	398
XLVII.	L'Honneur du Nom	408
XLVIII.	Conclusion	416

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THE MATCHMAKER.

CHAPTER I.

PENELOPE.

Flowers have a time before they come to seed,
And she is young and now must sport the while. — DANIEL.

'I SHALL go to the Carnousties',' said Penelope, promptly.

Penelope had a clear, sweet voice, with a ring of decision in it. The voice to which she now replied was neither so clear nor so sweet, but the decision was inherited.

Mr. East had been explaining to his daughter, at some length, certain circumstances as to which his mind was made up; and her response, which was, as we have seen, brief, indicated not the less surely a lucid perception of her own will.

The father and daughter were breakfasting together, and no one else was present. There seldom was any one else present at this early meal.

'You will go to the Carnousties', eh?' said Mr. East, putting down his coffee cup. ''Pon my word — yes — that is an excellent idea. The very place for you. They will be glad to have you, I suppose?'

'They have asked me, you know, papa, often — that is, once. I mean last year. But I think — oh, yes, I am sure — they would be glad to have me. Anyhow, I shall write, and offer.'

'It would be the very place for you,' repeated her father, with evident satisfaction. 'Respectable quarters — respectable people. Relations, too. I wonder how I did not think of them before. You would be happy enough with the girls.'

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'Girls!' Penelope gave a little laugh.

'Eh?' said Mr. East, lifting his eyebrows. 'Well, aren't there girls?'

'The youngest "girl" is five-and-twenty, the eldest five-and-thirty,' replied Penelope, succinctly.

'By Jove! Are they really? And why the deuce are they not married, then? But, all the same, I don't see why they should not be companions for you. I'll bet you know as much as they do, living on and on in that queer, out-of-the-world place, and in their queer old-fashioned style. I have not been to Carnoustie Castle for some time, but when I was there last, not one jot or tittle of difference could I perceive between its ways then, and what they had been a dozen years before — or for that matter, ever since I could remember. Gad, it was curious!' And the man of the world, who studiously accommodated his mind, manners, habits, and customs to the march of time, and kept even step with every modern circumstance, leaned back in his chair and laughed.

'Yes, I shall go to the Carnousties',' repeated Penelope, as though she had not been listening. 'It is a good opportunity. I have often wished to go. And as I shall have to be *somewhere* if you are to be away till Christmas, it would be the best "where" I know.'

'Precisely. A good billet in every way. Dull as ditchwater, but the essence of respectability. Old Scotch baron — old castle — old family coach, and all that sort of thing. Poor and proud. If they would let me pay for you — but I suppose it would not do to offer, eh? What do you think? No, I suppose it would hardly do to suggest it.'

'Papa!'

'Humph! "Papa." Many families would jump at a family arrangement of the kind. I have to go off to the West Indies — can't take my daughter — am obliged to throw her on the hospitality of relations — don't wish her to be a burden — eh? Could it not be done somehow?'

'They would simply be insulted. They are not so very poor, either.'

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'Oh dear, no; comfortable enough, I dare say. Only your landed proprietors, what with all the repairing and tinkering to be done up and down their estates — what with the constant drain going on — can seldom be flush of ready money in these times, I should imagine. Probably Carnoustie does not net a third of his nominal rent roll. He has a big house to keep up — and a title. A title is a dear luxury, especially in Scotland. Still, I dare say you are in the right, and that it would hardly do to offer any compensation. I can send presents when I return.'

'You mean to return at Christmas?'

'A little before Christmas; but it is impossible to say to a week.'

'And this is May,' said Penelope, musing. 'I should have June, July, August, September, October, November, and part of December to get through. It is a long time.'

'A deuced long time; but I don't see how to shorten it.'

'It would not do for me to be going about paying visits,' reflected Penelope. 'I am not the regulation visiting-out young lady, and I should detest the life. But, all the same, six months and a half of a lonely country house in the west of Scotland' — then suddenly the sunlight burst forth all over her face. 'Papa, I think it would be glorious!' she cried. 'It would be a new world. I should leave behind me everything I have learned hitherto, for weal or for woe. I should burn my boats when I set foot upon that island shore. For six months and a half I should be a Carnoustie among Carnousties; and if, at the end of it, you should return from your voyage a wiser and a better — or, at any rate, a richer — man, you would find that I, too, had not been idle, but had laid in a large store of that valuable commodity, experience.'

Within the hour she had despatched a missive to Carnoustie Castle.

Great was the surprise and excitement it created there. Lord Carnoustie, who had followed the letter-bag in, and was unlacing his boots in the drawing-room after a long wet walk — a practice against which his wife's remonstrances had only prevailed so far as to cause him to perform the operation behind her chair

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— was startled in the midst of it by the flutter of the women, all pressing round to hear, and exclaim.

'What is it — what is it?' demanded he testily; for partly by reason of his stooping posture, partly of his being naturally what the Scotch call 'dull of hearing,' he could not catch the gist of the matter. 'What are ye saying? Who's coming? Who's offered a visit? Penelope? Who's Penelope? Can't ye speak plain?' irritably snapping as he spoke the well-worn leather boot-lace, which he had been aware beforehand was far through, but had thought by careful handling might last another time. The outcry around provoked him the more, as he felt to it was due the jerk which had severed the weak part of the lace.

'Provoking!' he muttered to himself, putting the bit in his pocket.

He durst not complain aloud, or Lady Carnoustie would have seen what he was about, and Lady Carnoustie was now happily engaged with her letter.

But he cast glances at the boot with its broken end from time to time, while she read and commented; and it worried him more to conjecture whether he had another lace of the kind in his drawer or not, than to consider whether a young unknown relation would be a welcome inmate of his household for a prolonged period of time, or whether she would not be somewhat in the way.

Had she been a man he would have cared much more; in fact he would not have had her at any price. He hated men guests.

Had she been an older woman, he would have rubbed his chin, blinked his eyes, and ejaculated, 'Pish!' and 'Pshaw!' and 'Dear me! What a nuisance!' — for he was an elder of the Kirk and never made use of stronger language — but when he understood that the Penelope whose calm little note had raised such a storm was the daughter of his cousin, Henry East, and that she was only twenty years of age, he merely said, 'Oh,' and after a minute's pause proceeded to pick out the leathern knot of boot number two.

Meantime the three Miss Carnoustes had all left their chairs, and were, as we have said, eagerly pressing round their mother.

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'For how long? For six months?' exclaimed Louisa, the eldest. 'She would be here all the summer and the autumn, then. She would help us with our summer visitors. Mamma, may I see the letter?'

'And me after you,' petitioned Joanna, who was next of age, covetously watching the document transferred. 'What a large hand! I dare say Penelope draws. If she does, we might go sketching together. I must tell her to be sure to bring her colour box, and plenty of Whatman's paper.'

'I wonder if she is fond of poetry?' murmured the third and youngest sister, the fair dreamy-eyed Wilhelmina, who, recognising the prior claims of the other two as regarded the all-important despatch, was patient and speculative. 'I wonder who are her favourites?' — looking round with a smile. Several smiled back: it was so like little Mina, they felt, to be thinking of such matters as poetry and 'favourites.'

Presently Mina walked to the window; and her back being turned to those within, a curious observer from without might have been struck by the sudden change the young lady's countenance underwent. It was no longer placid, gentle, sweet; it was working strangely.

'I suppose I must say we shall be very glad to have her,' said Lady Carnoustie, turning her head in the direction of her husband, but still not perceiving him, hidden as he was behind the huge back of her chair. 'I do wish, my dear, you would not sit behind me. It is so uncomfortable that way you have of taking up your position away from us all. Pray come nearer, and let us see you.'

'I'm here — I'm here,' replied her husband, scraping his chair an inch or two forward. 'What d'ye want to see me for? I'm beside you. But I'm wet and ——'

'And dirty.' Lady Carnoustie supplied the proper adjective by intuition. 'I don't think you ought to get wet through at your age,' she added. 'And really you might go upstairs to change, before coming into the drawing-room.'

'Hoots! Nonsense! I came in because I saw old Posty at the door, and I wanted my letters. Were there none for me? None?'

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'None for any of us, except this from Penelope. Of course, I must say we shall be very glad to have her, and she had better come by train to Glasgow, and catch the boat from there? Or should she catch the boat from Ardrossan? That would shorten the passage'—Lady Carnoustie had a horror of steamboat travelling—'but the Ardrossan boats are not so good,' she meditated; 'and, after all, it is not open sea between Glasgow and Ardrossan——'

'Considering that it is the Clyde as far as Greenock, at any rate,' remarked Lord Carnoustie, almost forgetting his broken boot-lace in the sardonic satisfaction of tripping up a wife who generally had the best of it, 'I should say she might be able to endure it. As for open sea? There may be a bit of a jumble between us and the main, when the tide is running strong—but as the crossing would be *after* Ardrossan, not *before* it——'

'Let her come from Glasgow then; that would be the more direct route. Let her take the train from London to Glasgow, and the steamboat from Glasgow here,' and her ladyship looked round for applause, feeling that she had shown her powers of organisation, as well as her knowledge of geography.

No one, however, took the hint; her daughters were still engaged with the letter, and her husband with his boot holes. Such indifference was exasperating.

It was a peculiarity of Lady Carnoustie's that she could change her mood in the twinkling of an eye, and smile and frown in a breath. She was not an ill-natured woman; she was not chronically peevish and hard to please, but she had a temper which flew round like a weathercock, and no one ever knew where to catch it.

This might have been a serious matter in many a household; at Carnoustie, 'dear mamma' was understood, and no harm was done.

Mamma was now irate. 'It seems to me that everybody has more right to Penelope's letter than I have,' she observed tartly, 'and really, considering it was written to me, I might be supposed to wish to see it for myself. I had scarcely glanced at it——'

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The sheet was put into her hand.

'Not until everyone of you has read it.' Still smarting from the lack of previous attention. 'You have such a way among you girls of pouncing upon everything that comes to the house and usurping it — and — and — really I never know what is my own, and what is not. As for this letter from Penelope, I — upon my word, I — it is quite new to me; I had not taken it in at all!'

'I am sorry, mamma; I did not understand you had not done with it.' It was Louisa who spoke. Louisa always spoke dutifully. 'We ought to remember that dear mamma is not strong,' she was wont to observe; 'we ought never to answer dear mamma when she is vexed with us.'

'My dear! "Done with it?" Why I had only just glanced at it! Literally I had barely caught the drift of Penelope's meaning, when you seized it out of my hand.'

'Pray excuse me.' Louisa looked distressed. 'I really did not understand.'

'Well, my dear; — well. Say no more. Only do try not to do it again.' Lady Carnoustie's brow cleared. All was once more serene, and Penelope could be chattily discussed, as indeed she was, morning, noon, and night, for many succeeding days.

The above may serve as a sample of family life at the old Scottish castle to which my heroine, Penelope East, was about to repair. A few more words about its inmates, ere we proceed with our story.

Lord Carnoustie was a dry, plodding, thick-headed yokel, who, if he had not been born a peer, would have made a very respectable ploughman. Wherever in life he had been set down, there would he have taken root. As his social groove had been fixed for him, he jogged along in it easily enough. As he had grown up to certain usages and customs, they suited him. He knew how to value a farm, and how to speak to the farmer. He could present a minister to the parish, and fancied himself a judge of the minister's sermons.

He was popular — as such a landlord was sure to be popular — among his tenantry; and the sight of his homely form, home-

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spun clad, surmounted by a battered hat which would have disgraced a scarecrow, was always a welcome one, be it met where it would.

When accosted, he would respond readily and familiarly, touching his hat to the hat touched to him; and if his interlocutor chanced to be an aged or privileged person, frequently adopting for the moment the broad Scottish vernacular.

Ordinarily he talked a certain fine old dialect which in these later times is hardly to be found among the fast withering representatives of former generations.

It was Scotch — broad Scotch, but it was not provincial Scotch. It was quaintly set off with subtle phrases and epithets, frequently of French extraction — for such still linger in many parts of North Britain, relics of a past when fair and beauteous France and 'Caledonia, stern and wild,' were closely knit by various bonds — and it was accentuated in a fashion of its own. But it was not vulgar; it was not coarse; it was not repugnant to the most fastidious ear.

Neither was Lord Carnoustie himself a person to be altogether despised. He had not, it is true, any remarkable mental or physical endowments; but he acted sturdily up to his own views of right and wrong; he lived among his people; knew their lives; with his own ear hearkened to their petitions, and with his own hand supplied their wants.

Moreover, wet or fine, winter or summer, the grizzled whiskers of the tough old lord were to be seen over the ledge of his own 'loft' in the parish church on a Sunday morning; and every shepherd on his farms, and every fisherman in the cottages along the shore, knew that no empty place ever escaped the small ferreting eyes which peered to right and to left, and raked the building through and through before the bell ceased ringing. Lord Carnoustie was always in his seat a full ten minutes before the minister ascended the pulpit, and he did not consider that period of time wasted.

At home, however, there was another master, and my lord was only vassal in chief.

It is not easy to describe such a personage as Lady Carnoustie. One can hardly say what she was. She was not one kind of

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woman, she was not another — sometimes it seemed as though nothing were left for her to be.

Perhaps the real key to her character lay in the fact that her health was uncertain, and she had for long permitted herself to be what her health dictated.

Thus she would be by swift transition, querulous, arbitrary, unjust; or affectionate, yielding, and colloquial: all in the turn of half an hour. One minute would find her very positive, and highly indignant that her word could be doubted; the next she would ruefully confess that she had not meant to go so far.

When in good humour she had a trick of smoothing and stroking the strings of her cap — for being old-fashioned she still wore a cap, and it had strings; when perturbed, the state of her mind would be discernible by the twitching hither and thither of the ribbons beneath her chin.

But whether genial or fretful, cross or smiling, Lady Carnoustie was dutifully ministered to by her daughters, and smartly served by the household.

Long usage had enabled one and all to take her mental temperature with half an eye, ere any request was made, or any fact announced; and in particular the two elder 'young ladies,' as Louisa and Joanna were still invariably termed in the house, were perfectly satisfied that everything their mother said or did was for the best.

They had grown up in an atmosphere impregnated with this idea.

Louisa was by nature a docile creature.

As we know, she was no longer in her first, nor even in her second youth. The *insouciance* of the teens had given place to the full-formed virtues of maturity, and these again betrayed the faint dawnings of mellowness. Yet so peacefully had each decade passed, that it had scarce left its trace on her outward appearance.

Her figure was still well proportioned in its outlines, if it had lost something of the plumpness of youth; her skin was as fair and soft, if a shade less delicately tinted, than it once had been; her hair, dressed somewhat more carefully, scarcely showed that it was a trifle less luxuriant.

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Neither had the mind altered. At fifteen Louisa had been a musician, a songstress, a collector of manuscript ditties and a voluminous transcriber thereof; at five-and-thirty she collected, sang, and transcribed as ardently as ever. Daily she practised scales and exercises at the accustomed hour; and the arrival of a fresh sonatina was still the interest it had ever been.

Louisa did not read the newspapers through. She read the leading articles and the 'Court Circular,' but explained that her dear parents did not think indiscriminate newspaper-reading fi. for girls. There were many things in the newspapers which one might come upon before one knew, if one were in the habit of reading promiscuously.

Indeed dear mamma thought most of the literature of the day very pernicious, and discouraged its being brought to Carnoustie. Joanna and she were, however, permitted to read *Blackwood*, should that magazine come in their way.

When Lady Carnoustie drove round to call at one or other of the three houses which comprised the neighbourhood, Louisa had the seat beside her mother. It was considered that as the eldest daughter of the family this was her rightful place; but she never exceeded her privileges; she neither took charge of the card-case nor issued directions to the footman. That, Lady Carnoustie would have stigmatised as 'usurping,' and Lady Carnoustie, ill or well, kept guard against 'usurping' in all its branches.

Joanna, the next sister, may be more briefly dealt with. She was Louisa with variations. In appearance they were alike, and they dressed alike in every particular. Each had a pet bird, but Louisa's was a canary, Joanna's a bullfinch. In lieu of playing and singing, Joanna drew and sketched. If Louisa did not care to make calls, Joanna occupied the vacant seat. Both worked for the poor, and taught in the school, and trimmed the flower glasses, and refrained from promiscuous reading of the newspaper, and adhered to dear mamma's judgment in everything.

And they ought not to have been ridiculed for it, but they were.

It was not their fault that they were made to limp through

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life in swaddling-clothes, tied and bound at every turn. No one had ever undone the bandages; how were the poor babes to undo them for themselves? They were but great pathetic infants, knowing nothing and caring to know nothing of life and its problems; the walls of a nunnery could not have more solemnly shut out the realities of existence than did the great gates of Carnoustie Castle.

And what about Mina — dear little Mina — Mina, who gave less trouble than anyone, who hardly ever needed to be spoken to or rebuked, and who was the meekest of lambkins beneath supervision and prohibition? Mina never 'usurped' nor 'pounced upon' her mother's prerogatives; Mina was the simplest, sweetest child — so easily guided, so willingly led.

Even Joanna had once been ruffled in spirit, and had gone about for a whole day muttering to herself because her mother had declined to discuss with her theology. Joanna had borrowed a book of sermons, which had turned out, to Lady Carnoustie's horror, to be 'broad' — 'shockingly broad,' according to her ladyship's views — and incensed at having been thus outwitted by a pious volume which she had thought might safely be perused without her intervention, she had vented her irritation somewhat unreasonably on the head of Joanna. Joanna, as we say, had grumbled under her breath, and terrible expletives in the shape of 'Thirty-three years old!' and 'No longer a school-girl!' had been heard to escape her.

It had been a sad experience, Lady Carnoustie said afterwards; and she hoped that Mina might never hear about it.

There were many things that Mina was never supposed to hear about. It was quite customary for Louisa and Joanna to pull their chairs close to their mother's sofa, and broach subjects which were dropped when Mina came into the room. Lady Carnoustie liked them to do this. She would have told you that she and her two dear elder girls had everything in common; that they agreed with her in all she did, and that by-and-by little Mina would be admitted to a like intimacy.

But the dear girls themselves knew that at any moment mamma was liable to turn upon them, and had they not been the perfectly plastic creatures they were they might not have been

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so happy in the sofa corner. As it was, they considered themselves privileged. Their mother talked to them as she did not do to Mina — that was enough.

And how about Mina's looks?

At Carnoustie she was considered very beautiful indeed, and very fascinating. In other places she was spoken of as 'the pretty Miss Carnoustie,' and 'the pretty Miss Carnoustie' she had been for a good many years, while still regarded as the baby of the family by her own people.

Mina never seemed to know anything or to do anything amiss.

Her blue limpid eyes were dreamy with poetic musings; for she was known to be a lover of poetry, and absorber of odes and invocations. Her gentle movements never brought her to grief, never ran her into mischief. She clashed with no one's prejudices, ran counter to no one's opinions. If she put out her hand to take anything for herself, she did it so softly that the motion was almost unperceived.

In consequence, it was the household creed that Mina was a tender floweret on whom no rough wind was ever to blow, and whose bloom was to be jealously guarded from contact with every sort of untoward circumstance.

CHAPTER II.

AN EPISODE.

Sigh for the hapless hour
That knit two hearts in one;
And only gave Love power
To die when 'twas begun.

Some years before the time at which our story opens, there had occurred a trifling episode in the life of Mina Carnoustie.

She had had a very, very little love affair.

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In almost any other household it would hardly have been dignified by such a name at all, but at Carnoustie Castle it was talked of with bated breath for months afterwards, and even in its decadence it was found to have still a flavour of its own in the annals of the household.

This is its outline, briefly sketched.

It was the custom of Lord and Lady Carnoustie to sally forth at long intervals and pay a stately family visit at the mansion of some noble relation or friend. It would be no mean house which was thus distinguished. When invited, their three daughters would accompany them, also suitable attendants; special conveyances would be ordered, the august path made smooth —in short, the whole thing would be done in style. Preparations on an adequate scale would have been previously made in every department, and dress would be considered of consequence.

On such occasions Lady Carnoustie was clingingly dependent on her own party, and prouder of them and more affectionate towards them than when at home. It gratified her more than she would have allowed to anyone to have Mina admired.

Accordingly when, once upon a time, a certain polite young gentleman and fellow guest at the house of a county magnate appeared to be flatteringly anxious to listen to every word Miss Mina said, and to make his own words agreeable to her in return, Mina's lady-mother was, in her own way, complacent. She made no remark; she never mentioned Mr. Etheridge's name, but she felt that she and hers were appreciated, and was not insensible of the honour.

The visit was paid, and the party returned to their own domain.

Lady Carnoustie was in a mood that for her was quite frolicsome on the following day, when Louisa and Joanna, athirst to talk over the dissipation, and enjoying it a hundred times more in the retrospect than in the reality, drew up their chairs, and eagerly began to babble of this one and that one, of what had been said and done, and hinted and hushed up.

They little guessed how careful everybody had been in their presence, poor things. It seemed to them that they had been quite dangerously worldly and frivolous, and needed to talk

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matters over all round, before their ideas, which had got altogether confused and unhinged, could be properly put into order again. Joanna, in particular, was brimful of excitement over a communication she had to make.

'I could not see you before by yourself, mamma — I mean with only Louie. I have told Louie about it, and we both feel you ought to know. You were too tired with your journey last night for you to be worried, but if you are equal to it now ——'

Her mother protested she was equal to it.

'It was just before we came away,' proceeded the narrator, with suppressed unction, and looking cautiously round as she spoke; 'Mr. Etheridge was talking to Mina on the doorstep, and Lady Ainslie — mamma, I think she is a *dreadful* woman — what do you think she said? Even if she had noticed that he was a little — a little — that he was rather struck by Mina's beauty, she ought never to have *spoken* about it, ought she?'

'Did she indeed speak of it? No?' exclaimed Lady Carnoustie, the colour rising in her cheeks. 'Was she really so indelicate? I should not have thought it of Lady Ainslie.'

'And wait till you hear what she said. She began by looking, in what I suppose would be considered an arch manner, at Mina and Mr. Etheridge; and then she took hold of my arm, and pinched it — pinched it quite hard — and whispered in the most horribly significant way, "Tell your dear mother that he is everything that is *elegible*, and that she may safely *encourage* him!"'

Lady Carnoustie started from her cushions, and stared almost wildly at the speaker.

'She did, indeed,' reiterated Joanna, solemnly. 'Those were her very words; and when I — I suppose I showed that I hardly knew what she meant, she, she *pointed!*'

'Pointed?' almost whispered Lady Carnoustie.

'Pointed with her finger! Poked it at them! No one was there; but still it was — it was — abominable.'

'I should think so, indeed. I — I can hardly credit it. That a woman — a lady — an old friend, under whose roof we were actually staying, could have behaved in such a manner, could have made use of such language, I could not — no, I could

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not — have believed it possible! What was the term she applied to us, Joanna? "Encourage," did she say?'

'Yes, mamma, "encourage."'

'She spoke of us — of your father and me — as if we were in the habit of "encouraging" suitors for our daughters? What have we done that Lady Ainslie should dare — that she should presume — that such an imputation, such a gross accusation ——'

'I don't think she saw it in that light, you know, mamma.'

'In what light? You are not defending her, Joanna?' Indications of a change of temperature were visible and audible. Joanna hastened to exculpate herself.

'No, indeed, mamma. How could I defend Lady Ainslie? I thought it was disgusting. I cannot tell you how shocked I was. I felt myself grow hot and cold, and she — she laughed at me, and seemed to think the whole thing was a good joke. Mamma, I do assure you that if I could have moved I should have run away; but it was all over so quickly, I had no time to collect my thoughts; and I have been quite miserable ever since. I have seemed to see Lady Ainslie's laughing face when she pointed her finger at Mina; it has quite haunted me,' and the poor prim lips trembled conspicuously as they spoke.

'Well, well, my dear' — Lady Carnoustie waved an acquittal with her head — 'you could not be expected to know what to say under such circumstances. You have not been accustomed to such coarse language. I must consult your father about it' — Lady Carnoustie always made great capital out of consulting her husband, which being interpreted only meant that she designed to chew the cud of a difficult problem in his enforced hearing — 'I must consider what steps we can take to prevent any recurrence of such a scene,' she proceeded. 'Poor little Mina! Little did she guess she was being made the subject of such cruel impertinence! Little did she suppose that such an interpretation was being put upon her innocent chatter! I did notice that Mr. Etheridge — ahem! — that he seemed rather a — a pleasing young man. I saw he admired Mina — of course; who could help doing so? And she seemed to be willing that he should talk to her, and sit by her; and this, I

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suppose, is what Lady Ainslie meant by "encouraging"! Well,' after a pause, 'well; there is one thing certain: he cannot possibly come to the house *now*. And if he should appear, as I believe he talked of doing, in order to walk with your father to view the archæological remains, Mina must not appear. She must stay upstairs.'

The resolution had been carried out in its entirety. The young man, who had been honestly impressed by the soft blue eyes and rosy lips of the youthful Scottish lassie, then in her twenty-first year, had developed a sudden desire to inspect some island curiosities within a short distance of Carnoustie Castle, and had, by judicious working, not only extracted from Lord Carnoustie a promise of being his escort thither, but an invitation to luncheon, which he designed to extend and amplify as occasion offered.

He had bidden Mina Carnoustie 'Good-bye' with a light heart, and a bright, significant glance; and something of a similar lightness and brightness had found its way into her bosom also.

But when, within a few days, the enamoured stranger rang the door bell and claimed the fulfilment of the promise, all had changed. We are aware to what the change was due, but this was all that Etheridge ever knew about it.

Lord Carnoustie was at home, likewise his wife, likewise the two elder young ladies; Mina was nowhere to be seen.

At every moment the visitor expected she would appear, and in every fresh room he entered that she would be visible.

But time passed; he lunched with the rest; his host put on his great-coat for the walk, and the hall door was opened.

Etheridge grew desperate. 'Your — your youngest daughter,' stammered he, perceiving his last chance about to vanish. 'Is she not — not — at home?'

'Oh, ay; she is at home,' replied Lord Carnoustie, looking for his stick. 'She is at home, sure enough. But I doubt she is busy' — (he had been instructed what to say in case of need). 'Oh, she knows you are here quite well,' he added, outrunning his instructions; 'she is just *busy* — ahem! — that's all.'

Mr. Etheridge took no more interest in the archæological remains, and left the island by the evening boat.

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The Carnousties — those who were in the secret — congratulated themselves upon having vindicated their honour from a heinous charge, and Lady Ainslie's little plan for the rescue of one of 'those poor dear Carnoustie girls' from spinsterdom was foiled.

Had she held her tongue, and not poked with her finger, and not pinched Joanna's arm, things might have been different, and this little story might never have been written.

No one ever knew what Mina thought of the matter. Mina, when desired to keep her room — to which a luncheon tray should be sent up from the kitchen — and not venture forth until her father and his guest should have set out on their expedition, had gazed somewhat blankly upon her mother, the while her cheek slowly crimsoned.

She had made no demur. Modesty forbade one. To have proclaimed boldly that Mr. Etheridge had come to see her — and her only — and that to baulk him of his end was cruelty to both the one and the other, would have been, to a girl brought up as she had been, absolutely impossible. To have petitioned for a reversion of the sentence would have been confessing too much. Her tongue had been tied; and she had not even dared to beg for an explanation of the whole arbitrary proceeding.

And Lady Carnoustie in her wisdom had not seen fit to offer any.

'We trust you, dear child,' she had stroked the golden curls with real tenderness as she spoke, 'and we know that you can trust us. Your father and I have our reasons for not wishing you to meet this stranger; our little Mina is very precious to us; and we cannot allow her to be made the target for ——' but here Lady Carnoustie had suddenly broken off to cough, and talk of other things.

'I did not even permit her to guess she had been talked about,' she exulted afterwards. 'It would have been too great a shock.'

Mina's other guardians cordially agreed. It was a triumph of diplomacy — a master-stroke — that reception of Lady Ainslie's *eligible* young man. Not to fail in courtesy, nor in hospitality, and yet to baffle him in the real object of his expedition, and

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put a stop at once, and effectually, to any hopes he had conceived — it was glorious.

Lord Carnoustie rubbed his hands and chuckled, reflecting on what would be Lady Ainslie's sensations when the story came to her ears; Lady Carnoustie drew up her long neck and bridled, pluming herself on having been the originator of the great idea; Louisa and Joanna basked in the reflected lustre of the family spirit so admirably shown; and anyone who had suggested that a young girl's happiness for life had perchance been sacrificed to blow away the bubble of a thoughtless word, would have been considered unworthy of the name of friend.

But, as we say, no one ever knew how Mina felt about it. She never told.

In those days Mina Carnoustie was a girl, much given to solitude and castle-building; she had built a castle in which there had figured a certain [illegible] idealised; possibly she had invested Etheridge with [illegible] which youth and imagination are so fain to bestow, and had awaited his advent with secret heart-throbbings of unacknowledged joy. No one could tell.

No one ever knew whether it had been any thoughts or hopes connected with him which prompted that watch from the heights kept by Mina for several days together at this period. Mina had plenty of excuses at command. She needed the walk. The weather was fine. It was a pretty sight to see the midday boat rounding the distant point.

But she did not take the walk, nor care about the sight, after Etheridge had come and gone; nor did his name from that day forward cross her lips.

This had happened, as we say, several years before the summer days wherein my readers are first introduced to Carnoustie Castle and its inmates.

No other 'insult' of a like nature had befallen the family in the interval; and its only apparent result upon the chief person concerned had been a deepening of the reserve which had distinguished Mina Carnoustie from childhood, and a strengthening of another characteristic of her nature.

What that characteristic was will presently appear; and if any

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among us are disposed to cast a stone at this poor girl during the course of these pages, let the above pitiful little tragedy plead for her, and let us remember that the wounds which bleed internally are often those which never heal.

CHAPTER III.

ARRIVING AT SUNSET.

The shifting clouds
[illegible]ray, a richly gorgeous train
[illegible]omp, attend his setting throne;
[illegible]nd ocean smile immense. . . . He dips his orb
[illegible]immersed; and now a golden curve;
[illegible]ives one bright glance, then total disappears.

SCARCELY had Penelope East come to look on her proposed stay at Carnoustie Castle as a thing to be, than she would gladly have been off her bargain.

She had settled it hastily, as was the way with her impetuous nature, and had magnified a few vague previous inclinations to pry into the strongholds of her Scottish relations into a persistent intention of repairing thither on the very first opportunity.

Then, when her offer had been accepted, she scarcely knew whether to laugh or to cry. She did not want to go at all. It would be dreadful — horrible; and she? — she would be the most forlorn, lonely, desolate little outcast on the face of the globe.

Whatever could have made her imagine that she wished to go to the Carnousties'? She knew nothing about them; they knew nothing about her. And she who had done what she liked, and said what she chose, and never met with a rebuke or a cross word from anyone in her whole life — how would she ever get on as the odd-man-out, the extraneous member of a household in which she would be of no consequence, and yet to whose authority she would have to bow?

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Penelope had been from infancy a petted, independent, motherless child. Of beauty she had a fair share, but it was rather due to brilliancy of colour and variety of expression than to any strictly well-cut features. Indeed she never let people have time to think whether she were pretty or not. She had so much to say and such a charming way of saying it; she had such an ardent interest in life; such manifold enthusiasms; and, above all, such fearlessness, frankness, and unconsciousness, that those who came within her sphere were simply stormed out of their judgment, and set afire with admiration.

On the surface Penelope was all that was bright and gay, but it was not the brightness and gaiety which in reality made her what she was; she had another side to her nature, and a side which was known to herself alone.

Often after she had been laughing and making merry, the giddiest chatterbox that ever whirled dullness to the four winds of heaven — when the hour was past and the guests had departed, and the lights were out — Penelope would turn up her little face to the sky above her, and whisper to herself these words:

'I am — *I;* and some day I am going to do — something.'

That was her creed. She knew that deep down in her nature there lurked a stronger force than had ever yet been manifested, and she believed in that force being there for a purpose.

Sometimes she toiled over what the purpose might be — sometimes she forgot it altogether.

She had outbursts of utter childishness, when the bird on the wing was not more free from every sort of care; when the guests at her father's house would be loud in their encomiums on her wit, her *esprit*, her repartee, praising alike her rippling laughter and her ready tongue; and when her father would swell with pride, the while he would reply with assumed indifference that Penelope was a good girl.

None of them knew the real Penelope in the least.

She had no intentions that they should know her; she did not mean to be riddled by questions, confused by instructions, and perchance interfered with.

She felt herself, her real self, to be very old and wise; and

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was at times provoked with this same real self because it was unrecognised as yet, and because the world would not take her seriously. Of course she would be taken seriously some day; but in the meantime she never could resist making people laugh, and so they did not believe in her.

When Penelope was younger, she had one day-dream which held its own for a considerable period of time.

Having never known her mother, on her father had been placed her childish illusions, and she had sought to picture him a man such as those she read about in books (Penelope was a great reader) — noble-minded, heroic, disinterested, self-denying — whose life should be devoted towards redressing the wrongs of humanity, and who should perchance have some especial holy quest on which to bend primarily his energies.

It was a little awkward to have to fashion this ideal father out of Mr. Henry East, and the awkwardness increasing with time, the day-dream had to be abolished, and in its place another adopted.

Why should Penelope herself not take up the discarded *rôle*?

Why should she not do and be something worthy — but worthy of what?

Of the name she bore? It was a very ordinary name, and the Easts were very ordinary people.

Of her parentage? Her mother had been a vain, foolish girl; her father was a rich and rather vulgar man.

Although Penelope would not for worlds have put this into words, in effect it really was all she knew about either the one or the other.

What then? She had no heritage of piety, or chivalry, or philanthropy. There were better things than things obtained by inheritance.

It was about this time that my heroine formulated her unspoken creed: 'I am — *I*; and some day I am going to do — something.'

At times Penelope was apt to grow impatient because she had been so long time in the world and had done so little for it.

Impatience had been busy within her breast, as it chanced, on the very morning chosen by her father to proclaim his intention

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of sailing for the West Indies on a six months' trip, and the announcement seemed almost startling in its aptness. Here, perhaps, was the very opportunity for which her soul thirsted, and she caught at it, as we know.

Mr. East's views were equally simple. Business demanded his taking the voyage, and 'Business before everything' had long been his favourite maxim. The disposal of his daughter was not even a secondary consideration, so confident was he that Penelope would know what to do with herself.

Of course she would do the right thing; and, of course, her prompt decision to pass the time of separation under the roof of Lord and Lady Carnoustie, his praiseworthy relatives, of whose ancestry and respectability and deadly dullness he stood as much in awe as it was possible for a prosperous, well-to-do, smart man of business to stand in awe of anything or anybody, elicited his heartfelt approval.

Subsequently, when her brow clouded with fears of the unknown and doubts of the wisdom of her choice, he could not understand it at all. Had she not herself suggested the Carnousties? And had not the Carnousties, on their part, responded handsomely? He could not comprehend what the girl would be at.

She did not enlighten him; and it ended in his laying the flattering unction to his soul that she was pensive because of her attachment to himself, rather than from any other cause.

It was a beautiful summer evening when the thin blue trail of smoke which heralded the approach of the Ardrossan steamer by which Penelope travelled was visible rounding the point of the bay which was her destination, and several watchers from different points of the castle were cognisant of the fact.

On the deck stood a slender, well-poised figure, gazing now on this outlook, now on that, with lips parted and eyes dilated.

Penelope had never in her life beheld anything more beautiful than this summer ocean, in which was reflected the golden sunset, the dusky mountain range, and every object along the rugged shore; while the herring-boats, whose red-brown sails were stretched to dry, and from whose decks faint wreaths of curling smoke ascended, indicating the approach of the evening meal,

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were mirrored so sharply beneath that it was not easy to separate the real from the ideal.

Earth, sea, and sky were steeped in glory, and not a ripple broke the glassy surface through which the little steamer clove its way.

Insensibly my heroine's spirits rose. It was not in human nature, certainly not in Penelope's nature, to be unmoved by such a scene; and the refrain to which her heart had been beating for many days past grew hushed and still beneath its influence.

That refrain had been — 'Six months! For six long months I am to be immured, buried in the wilds of an unknown region, amidst unknown people!' And she had been unable to look beyond the six months.

This is the way with the young. With Mr. East, on the other hand, the six months had scarcely been of any account whatever. He had skipped them completely when making out his map of the future, considering that they were simply the bridge by which to pass to greater things.

He was going to do this and that when he came home. His brain teemed with projects; and as for the intervening space, why, he had to take a voyage first — that was all. He would be back in December. December seemed quite close at hand. Whereas Penelope had thought of nothing else than of the new place and the new people into whose midst she was about to be thrown.

While now gazing on the slumbering mountain peaks — now on the knolls beneath, grey and rugged, yet blooming withal — now on the jets of silvery waterfalls, and broadening streamlets flowing shorewards — and now on the rocky coast bespread with shining weed, and intersected with fiery pools — all irradiated, all sunk in gorgeous haze — she could no longer feel sad.

The paddles of the steamer began to slacken; she stopped outside the castle bay.

'Why are we stopping here?' demanded the lady passenger, divining that the halt probably had to do with herself.

'Thonder is the boat putting out to us,' replied one of the crew, indicating with his forefinger a lumbering ferry-boat, in

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which were seated a couple of rowers, who were looking over their shoulders as they steered for the side of the steamer.

'Are we not going to land at the pier?' said Penelope, her quick eyes having espied a small wooden quay, close below the gates of the castle avenue.

'No the nicht,' replied her informant. 'We canna get in when the tide's sae low. It's the way o' thae piers. They are only for the fu' tide. There's a heap o' them aboot these pairts.'

'What an odd thing to do, to build a pier and not be able to use it!' observed the young lady, into whose scheme of life 'use' entered at all points. 'Now, why was the pier not built where you could get in at all times, wherever the water was?'

'Ay, indeed, what for no?' rejoined the sailor, placably. But it was not his business to argue the matter, and it was to fling the rope in his hand to the men in the boat; and even Penelope perceived it best to hold her tongue and watch the proceedings.

It struck her as a decidedly romantic and picturesque mode of landing on her island home, to be picked off the larger vessel in a rough, tarry, open boat, by a couple of wild-looking islanders, jabbering in a tongue almost unintelligible! Had the night not been so still she might have hesitated; but, as it was, she leaned over the deck-rail with a smile.

One of the men stood up; the two shipped their oars, and prepared to float alongside, exchanging salutations with those on board as they did so.

It amused Penelope to see her luggage — her large dress-baskets, her portmanteau and hatbox, her hold-all and dressing-bag, and, lastly, her rugs and umbrellas, carefully deposited in the broad open space of the ferry-boat; it made her smile afresh to behold the consternation, the whimpering and entreating of her silly Marie, the French maid, who hated the whole project, but had an inkling that she would make her own out of it somehow or other — it was downright fun to see Marie's face when told her turn had come, and that she must pop over the side herself.

Marie, to be sure, did wonders the next moment. No true Frenchwoman will ever submit to be a laughing-stock when

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necessity is at her heels, and Marie, directly she recognised the inevitable, nipped up her skirts and was down the ladder before Penelope had time to remember the next turn would be her own.

Marie having taken her seat as directed, without a stumble or a hesitation, Marie's mistress, you may be sure, was on her mettle to do as well.

By sheer ill luck she did very badly.

Really it was not her fault, but in her nervousness she let go too soon the hand which guided her from above and floundered heavily into the arms of the fisherman below, Peter meanwhile being rated and abused for his carelessness. Peter made no effort to exculpate himself; he was far too chivalrous and too stolid; and by-and-by even her torn flounce, and Marie's half-exultant commiseration, ceased to annoy, and Penelope took off her glove and drew her bare hand through the warm salt water, happy as a babe.

The dull measured thud of the oars in their rowlocks, and the cries of sea birds feeding or wading among the shallow pools, alone broke the silence as the boat slowly neared the shore. Penelope, hanging over the side, gazed into the world of feathery weed and silvery sand over which they passed. Marie from time to time gave utterance to faint exclamations beneath her breath.

On a sudden she started violently, and the two rowers and Penelope also turned their heads to the spot whence proceeded an ear-piercing screech, obviously directed towards themselves.

'It's Tosh,' observed one of the men to the other, with a subdued smile. 'He wad ken whae we hae gotten here, and a' aboot it. Tosh is aye fain to ken a' body's business;' and both laughed softly. They were now near enough to distinguish what Tosh was saying.

'Are ye for Carnousties'? Ech? What d'ye say? Peter? John? Are ye for Carnousties'?'

'Oo, aye, Tosh. We're for the castle. Wull ye len' a han' to pu' in the boat?' replied Peter, who was apparently the spokesman of the pair.

Tosh sprang into the water.

'Noo, Tosh, noo,' remonstrated Peter, in accents of indul-

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gent reproof as though correcting a child, though it was a bulky, grey-headed man who now splashed his way towards the party, 'ye needna hae wetted yersel', ye ken. But sin ye *are* in — here — catch haud — pu' her forrit, there's a guid lad — wull we get in here, think ye? Or stop, the water's no sae deep as it micht be; a bittie this way, Tosh; a bittie wast, man — stop a wee,' and deftly pushing and steering with his own hands, the boat was at length inserted into a narrow creek, alongside a ridge of rocks, begirt with slippery tangle.

Peter sprang out. 'Noo, leddies, can ye manage?'

They stood up.

'Noo, Tosh, my man, stan' back,' for Tosh was chivalrously extending a foul hand, dark with many stains, and dotted with shining herring scales, 'jist stan' back for a minute,' exhorted Peter McTavish, kindly, 'and it's yersel' shall show the leddies the road ower the rocks, Tosh.'

Then, as Tosh started at once, proud of his mission, 'He's pairfetly hairmless, leddies,' explained Peter; 'he's just a bit body — a daft body — whae gangs aboot these pairts. He's no jist like ither fowks. But a' body kens him; and he kens a' body. He'll tak' ye bonnily ower the rocks, for he's aye howkin' aboot at the low tide; and thonder's some o' the castle fowks, comin' doun by; they'll be at the pier-head afore ye,' and having discharged his part so far, the stalwart fisherman turned to his inanimate cargo, which had still to be disposed of.

'But de luggage — de boxes?' ejaculated the Abigail, ruefully eyeing the stretch of tawny sea-weed, intersected by glowing sea-pools which lay between her and the road.

The boatman grinned. 'It'll be a' richt; nae fears. We hae carried mair than's here ower the rocks. Follow Tosh, leddies; he kens the road fine.'

They stumbled along, Tosh chattering in front.

'Vat you call "idiot,"' murmured Marie, in her mistress's ear. 'And we come to this strange place, and arrive in this strange way! In charge of an idiot! *Bah!*'

'Hush!' said Penelope. 'It — it is all right. Don't you see them waiting for us on the road? A gentleman and three

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ladies. They cannot help the tide being low — ah!' she slipped as she spoke, and had to give further attention to her steps.

'Very strange place — very strange way to arrive!' muttered Marie.

Tosh, however, thought differently. Rarely had he had such an opportunity for the exhibition of his company manners; and, unable to restrain himself until properly within earshot, he now began to yell forth information regarding his convoy to the party in front, interspersed with patronising directions and encouragement directed towards themselves.

'They're here! This is them! I hae brocht them ower the rocks! They didna ken the road!' Then looking back: 'Lord's sake! leddies, mind the burnie. Ye're no needin' to cross it. Haud this way. I'se show ye the road. It's mysel' kens it better nor ony o' them. Thonder's Carnoustie's fowks waiting for ye. Hi, Carnoustie!' addressing the old baron in tones of easy familiarity, 'ye see, I hae brocht them. Peter bade me, and I hae dune it. Wull ye no gi' me a penny, Carnoustie?' and as he spoke the poor fool sidled confidingly towards the little party, and, it must be confessed, did his part in taking off the edge of an arrival secretly dreaded by one and all — by the Carnousties because shyness with them was the crust of ages, and by Penelope because she was one against numbers, and she felt herself a very small and palpitating unit at the moment.

'Come, come, Tosh,' said Lord Carnoustie, shaking hands with his young visitor, and making an awkward inclination, accompanied by a grunt, to the maid — who, he told his wife afterwards, looked such a lady he was nearly shaking hands with her too — 'Come, come, Tosh; it wasn't worth a penny, now. Ye mun do mair nor that to earn your penny, Tosh,' in Scotch as broad as Tosh's own. 'Come, come; I hae na seen ye do your jumps for mony a day;' then aside to Penelope, 'It pleases the poor fellow to be asked to show off his accomplishments, and we all humour him. Can you wait a moment to see him go through one of his performances?'

'Only dear mamma will be getting anxious to see Penelope,'

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hinted the eldest Miss Carnoustie, who carried her mother's shadow about with her everywhere.

'Tosh won't take a minute,' replied her father. 'Hi, now, Tosh ——'

'Penelope looks tired,' suggested Joanna.

'I tell you it won't take a minute.' Lord Carnoustie was now obstinately bent on having his own way, and once out of his wife's presence he generally did have it; Penelope learned afterwards to apprehend that at different times she had different people to deal with in the stout old peer. 'I tell you, it pleases the poor fellow.' Tosh was looking from one to the other to see whom he was to obey. 'Noo, then, Tosh, ye're a gran' jumper, ye ken,' winking to Penelope to take her into confidence; 'doun wi' your stick, an' let's see hoo ye gang ower it,' concluded the speaker, with a peremptoriness which admitted of no further parley.

Tosh readily laid down his stick.

He then retired to a short distance, coughed, giggled, spat upon his hands, rubbed them on his breeches pockets, wagged his head, glanced at his audience to make sure that every eye was upon him, and finally, with a tremendous effort, ran feebly forward, and sprang over the stick, a distance of about three feet.

A peal of shrill laughter ran through the air.

It emanated from Penelope, who, all unprepared for such an anti-climax, had been watching the scene with any feeling but that of real amusement. A set smile had indeed played upon her lips, but it had merely been there from complaisance, and she had expected nothing less than to be made to laugh because she could not help it. So droll, however, was the genuine pride of the poor idiot in his supposed feat, and so sudden and unlooked for the termination of his solemn preparations, that contain her merriment she could not, and from that moment she had Lord Carnoustie on her side.

'There, ye see, Tosh, that young leddy never saw anything like that before,' said he, laughing heartily himself. 'That was grandly done, Tosh. Here's your penny. And tell Mrs. Alison to gie ye a piece ——'

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'Me and Mrs. Alison's no vera thick the noo,' observed Tosh.

'Has she no been kind t'ye, Tosh?'

'It's me that's no been kind to her,' said Tosh, with dignity. 'But maybe we'll mak' it up, if it's yersel' whae tells us tae, Carnoustie. Aweel, I'll awa up to the castle, and see what comes o't, ony way,' and he shuffled off to wheedle what he could out of Mrs. Alison, the housekeeper, between whom and himself there existed a close friendship and a chronic feud.

CHAPTER IV.

LADY CARNOUSTIE DIAGNOSES PENELOPE.

She has beauty — but still you must keep your heart cool;
She has wit — but you mustn't be caught so. — MOORE.

IT stood to reason that directly Penelope was ensconced in her room and could be left there, a conclave to discuss her should be held in the sofa corner, by the select three who held the privilege.

Lord Carnoustie and Mina were not considered eligible for membership to this tribunal.

'She seems to be a well-mannered girl,' began Lady Carnoustie, in a tone of cautious reservation, for she prided herself on never forming hasty judgments. 'Perhaps she talks a little too quickly; I observe many young people do that, especially English ones; but her voice is sweet, and I approve of her suggestion of calling me "aunt."'

'Do you indeed, mamma?' Louisa had presumed to feel sure that her mother would not approve, and had actually been about to say so. 'Do you really? I was afraid you would consider it impertinent. I mean that it was not Penelope's place ——'

'It all depends on how a thing is done, my dear. It might have been impertinent in an impertinent girl; but Penelope has

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a — a — I own I could see nothing unbecoming in her manner,' which was a wonderful admission on the part of her ladyship.

It was not her way to praise. To have expressed herself charmed by the bright face and frank bearing of her young visitor, to have exclaimed, 'What a dear girl!' or even 'What a pretty girl!' would have been absolutely unheard of with her; but both Louisa and Joanna knew that a favourable impression, a remarkably favourable impression, must have been created when their mother went the length she did.

Louisa, indeed, experienced a twinge of jealousy.

'But you are not her aunt,' she murmured, exhibiting more dissatisfaction than could have been expected from such a perfectly trained disciple.

'I am not her aunt; but what am I? Her father's cousin by marriage. Quite a near relation. She could not call me "Lady Carnoustie."'

'We thought — Joanna and I — that she would call you "Cousin Wilhelmina."'

'If you had consulted me, instead of settling it between yourselves' — Lady Carnoustie was up in arms in an instant at 'Joanna and I' — 'if you had come to me with your difficulty, I would have shown you the way out of it. Of course, if you think you know everything ——'

'Dear mamma, indeed we think nothing of the kind. But should you yourself not have thought "Cousin Wilhelmina" would have sounded more respectful?'

'Not at all. It would have been very troublesome to be saying "Cousin Wilhelmina" at every moment, whenever Penelope wanted anything. "Cousin Wilhelmina, may I go out?" "Cousin Wilhelmina, may I read this book?" I have no doubt Penelope has considered the matter thoroughly' — (Penelope had never given it a thought until, as she kissed her hostess, she called her 'aunt' by accident) — 'and really she has shown some ability in devising this mode of escape from an awkward predicament. She will also call your father "uncle" while she is with us.'

That settled the question.

'Do you think she is pretty?' inquired Joanna next, neither

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daughter having the imprudence to hazard an opinion until its direction were duly indicated.

'Pretty? Ye—es. Yes, I think she is pretty. She has a bright complexion, and — and there is something altogether rather pretty about her, but I don't know what it is,' pronounced the oracle, in the sententious manner of a person who could afford to say 'I don't know.' No one, not even such a one as herself, could be expected to know everything.

As a matter of fact, her perceptions were of the dullest; even Louisa and Joanna were more observant, so that items which would altogether have escaped her were frequently brought to her ken by these devoted adherents.

Thus — 'She has very brilliant eyes,' observed Joanna.

'Ahem!' said Lady Carnoustie. She had not noticed the eyes.

'And though her mouth is rather large, it is a well-shaped mouth. Don't you think it is a well-shaped mouth?'

Lady Carnoustie had not the remotest recollection of the mouth.

She was not, however, to be baffled.

'As you say, my dear, she is really pretty; and she is also, what *I* consider of much more importance, well-bred in appearance. Now that she is among us, and there is no harm in confessing it — at any rate, to you two, who, I know, will be discreet; perhaps it would be as well to say nothing to Mina — but I really did have some doubts as to whether Penelope East would be well-bred.'

They assumed expectant attitudes.

'You must know,' proceeded their mother, in her usual measured accents, 'that the Easts are not quite in our own rank of life. Henry East is a Jamaica merchant.'

They tried to look as if this were new to them.

'His mother was a Carnoustie, and it was considered quite a good match for her to marry Mr. East, because he had a large fortune,' proceeded Lady Carnoustie, who would have tried the patience of Job, or anyone but her present well-seasoned hearers, it being her invariable practice to begin at the beginning, as children say, of every narrative, and dribble forth information

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by one solemn drop at a time, even when preliminaries were stale, and she really had something fresh to say.

'The Easts have always mixed in London society, though to be sure London society is not quite what it used to be in my young days,' she now continued, slowly; 'and of course Henry East, Penelope's father, has had every advantage that money could buy. He has been to Oxford, and travelled. Then he married while quite young, and married into a good family. No doubt his mother's being a Carnoustie opened the way for this. His wife's name was Gerard. I believe she belonged to a very good family. Your father knows all about them. When Henry East married, your father wrote to him, for he was much pleased at his marrying into a good family.' She paused, and Louisa and Joanna nodded sympathetically. They could quite understand this. It was of course very desirable to marry into a good family.

'But she died young,' proceeded Lady Carnoustie, with a gentle sigh, which almost inferred that a good family ought to have provided against such a mishap. 'She died when her little girl was only a few years old; and, since then, Penelope can have had no advantages. We invited her here, but she did not come. I don't know that she has had any advantages. She has certainly an attractive countenance and a pleasing address, but I fear we shall find when we look beneath the surface that there is not much more to admire. Brought up in London, in a London street, and with no mother to guide or instruct her, one can hardly imagine either what she does know, or what she does not!'

Louisa and Joanna shook their heads. The conversation was growing more interesting. Lady Carnoustie herself was conscious of a new light upon the subject.

Previously she had thought of her cousin's child as a poor half-educated, ignorant, semi-orphan, to be pitied and instructed and brought within the radius of her own beneficent superiority. It now began to dawn upon her — possibly the fit of Penelope's frock and the smart cut of her travelling pelisse had something to do with the enlightenment — that the young lady might have something to teach as well as to learn. And

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the teaching might not be teaching approved at Carnoustie Castle.

'I only hope none of you will learn any harm from Penelope,' she began afresh, a frown chasing away the bland benignity with which she had hitherto commented. 'You, Louisa, and Joanna, I am not afraid of. I think I may trust you. Your principles are too thoroughly established to be easily shaken. But Mina? We must think about Mina. She might be more easily led; and the very guilelessness of the dear child's nature might make her susceptible of evil influence. Far be it from me to suggest that Penelope's would be an evil influence; but still we have no guarantee that it would not. And our dear Mina has been so carefully guarded hitherto, that one cannot but dread exposing her to contact with the world in any shape.' Then impressively, 'I should not leave our little Mina too much alone with Penelope, girls.'

'Not until we know what Penelope really is, mamma.'

'True. You are right to correct me, Louisa. Very true. Not until we know what Penelope really is. At present, for aught that appears, she may be anything.

'Yes,' proceeded Lady Carnoustie, stroking her cap strings with renewed complacency, 'it would be foolhardy to trust a London girl too much. A London girl *must* know a great deal, and be cognisant of many things whereof you, my dears, are happily ignorant. I cannot be thankful enough that we have been enabled to rear you in ignorance of the vices and follies of the world at large. I have much to be thankful for. In the main you are dutiful daughters, and though the spirit of the age has penetrated even here, and you are, as I often tell you, inclined to usurp a certain position to which you are not entitled — for while I am with you I must be at the head of this house' — she was wandering off into the old wilderness of talk which all knew so well, and which never led to anything — but happily relief was at hand: Mina came tripping into the room; Mina looking more animated than usual, and in consequence prettier.

Lady Carnoustie's brow relaxed, and she smiled tenderly.

'Where have you been, love?'

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'Only round to the farm, mamma. I ran round after we left Penelope in her room. I went to see the cows milked.'

'You will be turning into a dairy-maid soon, Mina,' playfully.

'I should like to be one. I am learning to milk.'

'You must get Penelope to learn too, little one.'

Mina laughed and ran away.

'And you, Louisa, might try to get her to take an interest in intellectual pursuits. Do not encourage her to talk about herself. Lead the conversation to the pleasures of music and reading — that is, the reading of good authors, such as Macaulay, or Motley. Motley is very safe, and Macaulay's History — with the exception of some portions of the reign of Charles II., which, you know, I always ruled out for you — is good reading for any girl. But, my dear Louisa, be careful with some others you have lately been asking me about. For instance, *George Eliot*. Although *you* may get no harm from *George Eliot*, her writings are not at all for girls of twenty, like Penelope; and you know even you only read *some* of her books. It would not do for Penelope to fancy you and she are to be on an equality in your reading. The safest way for her will be to apply first to you, and then together you can bring under my notice the author she desires to study.'

And Penelope had had the run of her father's library, ever since she was old enough to mount the ladder!

What was Penelope now doing?

Lady Carnoustie pictured her youthful visitor superintending the unpacking of her trunks and the arrangement of their contents. My reader may have conjured up a vision of a tender-hearted, susceptible girl gazing pensively from her turret window on the beauteous landscape now veiled in shadow; for the sun had sunk, and darkness was fast gathering over sea and land. As a matter of fact, Penelope was ensconced in the biggest chair in the room, and was saying to herself with a smile that was almost a laugh upon her lips, 'What a queer lot of people I have come among!'

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CHAPTER V.

MASTER AND MISTRESS.

I have lost several places, sir, by obeying the master against the mistress, but never lost one by obeying the mistress against the master. — MOLIÈRE.

'WE'VE a new neighbour,' announced Lord Carnoustie, the following morning at breakfast. 'Inverashet is let.'

'Have you heard to whom?' inquired his wife. Lady Carnoustie's grammar was always irreproachable; her daughters had once been lectured for an hour at a time, because one of them had put a like question, wording it 'who to?'

'Redwood is the name. He's a young man, — an Englishman, — a bachelor with no family,' —

'My dear Carnoustie!'

'Well? "My dear Carnoustie!" What d'ye mean? What's wrong? What have I said? The man *is* a bachelor, and he *has* no family; what fault have you to find with him for that? Joanna, cover up the scones again, you'll have them as cold as stones; and just put a little more coffee in this, my dear,' handing his coffee cup to be replenished; 'but don't throw away that that's in; oh! what waste!' angrily, as his wife, turning a deaf ear, poured the contents into the slop-basin. 'It was perfectly good. I only wanted it warmed up. Women are all alike for wastery,' muttering to himself over the long-standing grievance.

It was an old, old wrangle. Ever since anyone could remember, he had fruitlessly sought to retain the dregs of his coffee when sending for a little addition to it, and to obtain a reinforcement instead of a new mixture.

Lady Carnoustie would not have it so. She could not see why the cup should not be properly cleansed, and properly refilled; and as she sat at the head of the table, and its whole length separated her from her husband, she was enabled to evade his request, and ignore his subsequent indignation.

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'He never will have things nice,' she said to herself.

She did not heed in the least that his eyebrows stood out over his eyes as he darkly watched the returning cup passed down the table, or that even as he sipped the good hot coffee, well made, and well poured out — a point to be observed by coffee makers — he did not look grateful; she was satisfied to have achieved her point, and made him comfortable in her own way; which was so very like Lady Carnoustie, that we must be pardoned for drawing attention to the little scene. We wish our readers to understand, if they can, the sort of person Lady Carnoustie was.

No one but her husband ever found it worth while to contend with her; and his doing so was solely due to the thickness of his skin. She might say what she chose, he did not care. She might browbeat him as she did the rest of them in her carefully chosen, formal phraseology; the words simply fell on deaf ears.

As he did not wish to be always in hot water, he would, it is true, make use of subterfuges on occasion; and hold his tongue as to occurrences when silence was desirable, or, as he himself put it, when there was no use saying anything; but, brought to bay, he was too tough even for her ladyship. There were things he liked to do, which the remonstrances of forty years had failed to stop his doing. Some of them, such as the unlacing of his boots in the drawing-room, were, indeed, done under the rose; but they were done, and Lady Carnoustie knew it.

She knew quite well what he was about when grovelling behind her chair in the dusk; and she was well aware that there were other grovellings which betokened in other ways a similar spirit of contumacy. Had she been wise, she would have either submitted openly, or affected ignorance; but we need hardly say that she was not wise. She was either bitter or fretful, according to her mood; and neither bitterness nor fretfulness was ever productive of the slightest result in any shape. It was only when she had such a chance as a coffee cup at one end of the table, and her husband's grumblings and splutterings at the other, that she scored a point in the small details of life. In its greater issues she held, of course, the reins.

She now returned to the subject in hand, having, as may have

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been perceived, one taste in common with her spouse; for no more arrant gossips existed in the place than the old lord and his lady.

'I have no doubt it was merely an awkwardness of expression,' she graciously observed, 'but you must allow it was an odd thing to say, Carnoustie.'

'What was an odd thing to say?' growled he, as yet unappeased. 'Such a quantity as you have given me! A perfect bucket full! I said I did not want a full cup.'

'Surely you can leave what you don't drink. Pray don't be tiresome, my dear. About this new neighbour of ours, Carnoustie?' suggestively.

'Well, what about him?' Carnoustie had the sense to perceive that he was 'on the right side of the dyke,' as he would himself have phrased it — master of the situation as long as he could succeed in baffling the general curiosity. 'You began by not liking what I told you about him, and so I stopped,' he added, with a malicious after-thought.

'Nay, I found no fault with what you told me, only with the way in which you told it,' rejoined Lady Carnoustie, looking round for applause. 'But, however, let that pass. You say this Mr. Red — Red ——'

'Redwood,' gruffly.

'This Mr. Redwood is young and unmarried. What are his other characteristics? He is a sportsman, I presume?'

'He would not have taken Inverashet if he were not.'

'Did you hear nothing more about him?'

'I heard all there was to hear.'

'You might at least repeat what there was. Naturally we take an interest in the tenant of Inverashet — a house only three miles off, and a house we are bound to visit.'

'I don't see how you can visit a young man.' Lord Carnoustie had been ruffled, and he was not yet fully restored to serenity. 'I don't see how it can matter very much to any of us,' he went on. 'If there had been a family, we should have had to do the civil whether or no — but if it's but a youngster ——'

'Would he get out in a small boat, as I did, opposite a

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house round the point, a little way before this — I mean before we came to this?' suddenly put in another voice, for Penelope had just been awakened to interest. 'A tall, good-looking young man ——' she stopped; her aunt and cousins were glancing at each other.

'Ahem!' said Lady Carnoustie, signifying, in language comprehensible to Louisa and Joanna, 'Take no notice. Remember she is a London girl. Be forbearing.'

'He got in at Ardrossan,' proceeded Penelope, wondering what she had said amiss. 'He got in after I did. He had a lot of luggage, and a valet. I heard them talking together, and I noticed it was all new to them. I heard him — the gentleman — say he had never shot these parts before.'

'And did you gather what sort of shooting he expected?' demanded Lord Carnoustie, keenly interested. 'He'll be finely mistaken if he has any great expectations. Macdonald knows how to puff and blow, but if he has made out that Inverashet is anything but an old barn of a house, with a shooting that's neither one thing nor the other — how did he talk about the shooting?'

'Oh, I cannot tell you that, uncle Carnoustie. Even if he had talked shooting talk, I should not have known what he meant. Nor would the valet, I opine. Two men like gamekeepers came out to meet him in a boat — a smaller boat than mine.'

'Ay, it would belong to the house. There is no ferry boat at Inverashet.'

'And he took a couple of dogs in the boat with him. Getting those dogs over the side of the steamer was fun.'

'But, my dear,' Lady Carnoustie could no longer hold her peace, 'my dear Penelope, were you, — ahem! — standing by and — and looking on?' She drew a face, what she meant to be a playful face of consternation at the idea.

'No, indeed, aunt; I lent a hand at the crisis. When the dogs were let loose, they made a rush for their master, and knocked his sticks and fishing-rods out of his hand (he had them strapped together in a bundle, you know); I picked them up, and held them for him, as he hauled the dogs overboard.'

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'A London girl!' was depicted on every line of Lady Carnoustie's face.

'What sort of dogs were they?' cried her husband, imperiously waving her down. When sport was in the question he neither resorted to compromise nor tolerated delay; he would be heard, and she should give way to him.

'Two large strong dogs, uncle.'

'Large — strong — dogs!' Lord Carnoustie stared. 'Do you mean to say *that's* all you have to tell about them? Large? Strong? They might be cart-horses. I suppose you can tell if they were Newfoundlands, or St. Bernards?' ironically.

Penelope, however, missed the irony.

'Oh, no; I am sure they were not those — that is, I am nearly sure,' replied she, in all good faith. 'I know a St. Bernard, for there is one next door to us in London; and a Newfoundland is the sort of dog Landseer paints, isn't he?'

'The sort of dog Landseer paints!' Lord Carnoustie gulped down something in his throat. 'Landseer painted every dog under the sun, if you must know; and if you are going to get your knowledge of dogs from Landseer's paintings, Miss Penelope — but I thought that no one could have mistaken a pointer or a setter,' he muttered.

'Has a pointer or a setter black curly hair?' inquired Penelope, with a bright thought.

'Black curly hair? Why, that's a retriever. One was a retriever, was he? Come, that's better. And about the other? Try and think what the other was like, there's a good lassie. Was he long or short haired? Was he black-and-tan, or liver-coloured, or — or ——'

'My dear Carnoustie, what *can* it matter? Do be content with knowing all about your own dogs.'

'But I'll not be content, madam. If I choose to know about other people's dogs, I will know about them. Don't you be afraid to speak out, Penelope' — she was now in high favour. 'Just take your time and think it over. Take your time; don't be hurried. Try to recall the other dog.'

'I can recall it perfectly well now, uncle. A smooth-haired

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dog, with a white coat blotched all over, and a high, sticking-up tail.'

'A pointer, for a wager!' cried Lord Carnoustie in an ecstasy. 'You couldn't have hit off a pointer better, lassie. A pointer, and a retriever. There, now I know what I want to know; and you can all of ye go at the girl for the rest. I'll be bound you will get more of her than I should. If it was Redwood — and it must have been Redwood, for no one else would get out at Inverashet with dogs, without it was a keeper ——'

— 'Oh, no, uncle; he was a gentleman.'

'Why, then, you heard, maybe, what brought him down so early, and if he has come to stay or not? It was a queer thing my not having heard the place was let, till the very day the tenant arrived; but it has all been done in a hurry. Maybe he has only come to look round, though. Did you hear if he had come only to look round, or to take up his quarters for the summer?'

As Lady Carnoustie also wished to be informed on these points, she permitted the interrogations to pass unchallenged.

But Penelope had very little more to tell. She had not overheard any further remarks let fall by the new tenant, and could only remember that the steamboat captain had turned to one of his men as the boat dropped astern, and remarked, 'He'll find the time long till the twelfth, I misdoot,' over which mysterious comment she had puzzled in her own mind.

She now produced it, and the riddle was solved instantly.

'Find the time long till the twelfth, did you say? Ay, ay; that means he'll be staying on till the twelfth, sure enough. Find the time long? Very certie, that he will, if he is nothing but a shooting man. He has all June and July to get through. Were you asking what the twelfth is?' to Penelope. 'It is the twelfth of August; the day when grouse-shooting begins, my dear.' Lord Carnoustie felt now quite friendly towards an informant who was contributing such a fund of information about his new neighbour, and who had enabled him to identify his new neighbour's dogs.

Penelope might think she had little to tell, but she had yet to learn how far a little could go at Carnoustie Castle.

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She had been interested in the man in the long light-grey coat, to whom pertained the portmanteaus and gun-cases marked 'C. R.'

There was not another lady or gentleman on board but themselves; and inspired by the romantic nature of her surroundings and the halo of the summer eve, she had, if the truth must be confessed, rather wished that something or other might happen to cause the tall figure which stood so immovably at the far end of the boat to turn round and behold herself.

If he would only wheel about and take an interest in passing events, (not that there were any passing events, except that a tiresome child with a cold in its head would keep running round and round the cabin skylight), — but still something might have been got up to please the gentleman, if the gentleman would have consented to be pleased; instead of which he stood stock-still with his hands in his pockets, sharply outlined against the sunset, gazing out to sea, as if nothing nearer hand merited even a moment's notice.

Penelope had had tea and bread-and-butter below; but he had never descended. On her re-appearance she found he had moved to another part of the deck, but was still keeping his intent watch ahead, still with his hands in the pockets of his long coat.

She had had, however, the satisfaction of seeing him turn once. His valet came up, and, addressing him, called attention to the dogs which he led by a chain; the same dogs which had been of such importance in [illegible] Carnoustie's eyes. It occurred to Penelope afterwards that she could have communicated to her uncle another item, which he would doubtless have snatched at voraciously, had she recalled it in time, — she had heard one of the dogs addressed as 'Duke,' and the other as 'Poacher.' The retriever was 'Duke.'

Having nothing else to do, and being at a restless age when every faculty is on the alert, Penelope had made the most of the trifling interlude. She had noted the affection of the dumb animals for their master, and his endurance of their endearments. He had permitted them to jump upon him, lick his hands, rub him, fawn on him, bark in his ears. He

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had even sat down that they might scale his person the more easily.

The valet had gone away, and left the dogs behind.

Now, Penelope had thought, supposing one were to break loose and frighten me! She had felt herself equal to being frightened — properly. If one, — say that active-looking, smooth-haired one, with the slobbering jaws — had begun to jump about over her as he was jumping over his master, she could have been frightened without over much feigning. She was not particularly fond of animals, and had never been accustomed to kennel dogs.

But neither Poacher nor his master had evinced the slightest intention of giving cause for alarm. Poacher presently seated himself contentedly in front of the long-coated figure, and the two gazed into each other's eyes, the head of the dog being held between the master's hands.

'He must be rather a friendly sort of creature, that,' Penelope had concluded, wishing afresh that the 'creature' would be a little more friendly to herself. 'He might see that I am all alone, and do *something* to amuse me.'

Being early in the season, passengers were few; and by the time one or two stoppages had been made, nearly everyone — even the uninteresting woman with the perambulating child — had been left behind. Presently there had literally remained not a soul on board but the young lady for Carnoustie Castle, and the young gentleman for somewhere else.

For a few brief minutes Penelope had entertained an idea on the subject. What if her fellow-traveller should turn out to be bound for Carnoustie also? She rather hoped he might be, and that she would become acquainted with him, and by-and-by tell him how dull she had been, and how she had longed to talk to someone — to anyone — while treading the golden deck, and traversing the placid water, that peaceful, beautiful evening. She would have made him repent of the persistency with which he had turned his back upon her.

But even while she had thus mused the vision was dispelled.

The valet had approached, and pointed to the island, under the lee of which the steamer was now passing.

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The master had jumped up, and looked round; anew both pointed and gesticulated; and eventually the captain had been summoned, who also pointed emphatically in the direction of a long wide glen, closed in by rocky moors on either side.

'That is where he is going to be put out,' concluded Penelope, shrewdly. And the event had proved her right.

As the steamer had drawn nearer the land, cottages had been discernible, as many as would form a scattered village; and from thence the boat which she described to her audience at the breakfast table, had put out and picked off her friend, his manservant, and his dogs.

She had called him to herself her 'friend,' but was grimly conscious, while watching the departing boat-load, that the friendship had been somewhat one-sided. She had, it is true, received a brief 'Thank you' when the bundle of sticks was delivered up; but even this might have been meant for the boatman who passed it on as much as for her. She had certainly never been looked at. All the same, it had amused, occupied, and distracted her thoughts to let them alight, butterfly-like, on the head of this unknown fellow-traveller; and if any of my readers choose to think the worse of her for it, let them.

Some people never find anything to make the time pass in such observations. Those people are not to be envied. They are the sort of folks who ensconce themselves in the corners of their own compartment of a railway carriage and never know what the opposite faces are like; who can wait passively for hours in the hall of a club, or the public room of an hotel, gazing into blankness, blind and deaf to the various little dramas being enacted on every side; who have no eyes to see the bitter disappointment on the child's face when the coveted article on the shop counter is beyond the reach of the little purse; who brush aside the groups that cluster weeping round the windows of the emigrant train — one of the saddest sights on earth — and wonder impatiently why such obstructions of the traffic are allowed.

Penelope East was not tainted with such egotism. Young, healthy, and happy, she actually did not consider herself the centre of the universe.

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CHAPTER VI.

PENELOPE WINS FAVOUR.

She doeth little kindnesses,
Which most leave undone or despise. — LOWELL.

AFTER breakfast Penelope wanted to go out, and Mina was ready to take her. The other young ladies seldom went out in the morning.

'But it will be nice for Mina to have a companion,' said Lady Carnoustie, benignantly. 'It is good for Mina to be out of doors; the open air is considered particularly strengthening for — young people,' (she had nearly said 'growing girls'). 'And you, my dear,' to Penelope, 'must try and get all the benefit you can from your stay in the Highlands, and pick up country ways from Mina. Mina is quite an authority on country life,' with the smile which almost invariably lit up her faded face at the mention of Mina's name.

'Poor old thing! Mina is the apple of her eye,' quoth Penelope internally; and perhaps for the first time in her life a faint compassion for her motherless self stole into her breast. Hitherto she had not thought much of it; but then, as we have said, although Penelope had always a great ado with her thoughts, they were almost always about other people.

'I'll learn, auntie,' she now responded, cheerfully. 'You will see how soon I shall know all about everything. In this beautiful place, and on a day like this ——!' She paused with sparkling eyes, and the dazzling freshness of the midsummer morning seemed to say all that needed saying.

'You like the place, Penelope?'

'Like it? Why, it is a perfect *heaven* of a place, auntie!'

Lady Carnoustie laughed, well pleased; even Lord Carnoustie stopped, with his fingers on the handle of the door, and blinked his eyelids, as he had a trick of doing when gratified. Penelope had brought down both her birds with one shot; indeed, the whole covey was for the moment at her feet.

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'I thought it lovely last night,' continued she, all animation, 'but to-day! I could hardly get downstairs at all for running backwards and forwards to my window all the time I was dressing. I made Marie do my hair while I sat in front of it and looked out. Those beeches with the blue water peeping through!'

'I should not have thought you would have known a beech, Penelope?'

'Lor', aunt!'

'My dear!' But Lady Carnoustie was in a gracious mind. 'What a — a peculiar expression, my dear! I suppose it is — modern?'

'Is it? I am sure I don't know. I thought it was rather old, to tell the truth. But how could you suppose I should not know a beech when I saw it?'

'Beeches are not very plentiful in London, my dear Penelope.'

'But lor' — I mean — I shan't say it again if it vexes you, auntie,' nodding merrily. 'I only mean to say I have not been in London all my life.'

'Oh! I thought you had.'

'Rather not! We go about, papa and I, to lots of places. Of course, we live in London — that is to say, we are there eight or nine months out of the year. But even when we are supposed to be in Portland Place we fly away for a few days very often. We go up the river; we have had a house on the river more than once.'

'The river? What river?' Lady Carnoustie prolonged the conversation, considering, as she informed her daughters presently, that she gained thereby an insight into the mode of life pursued by Henry East and his daughter. Lord Carnoustie, however, now slipped away.

'Why, *the* river,' laughed Penelope, looking round with frank eyes. 'We always talk of "the river" — we Londoners. The Thames, to be sure, auntie.'

'Oh, indeed, the river Thames. But it is not very pleasant for water-parties, as it passes through London, is it? It seemed to me all docks.'

('She *is* dense,' ejaculated Penelope beneath her breath.)

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'Of course, we don't go on the river where it passes through London,' she explained as urbanely as she could, 'but only a very little way out — only about half an hour or an hour by train — you can get on to the river where it's *lovely*. All sorts of creeks, and bends, and islands, and backwaters. We go further away when we take a house; we generally manage to be somewhere near Henley, or Wargrave; because those are very good parts, and papa can dash up to London at any time when he is wanted, and be down to dinner, and out on the water again in the evening. If papa had not needed to go abroad this summer there was a jolly old house that I think we should have taken. We both fell in love with it one day when we were scooting about. It *was* a jolly house!'

'"Jolly house!"' murmured Lady Carnoustie internally. '"Scooting about!" And oh, that *dreadful* "Lor'!"' But she refrained. She would talk it all over with the girls first, and meantime be forbearing. Accordingly she now merely signified that the party might break up. The two younger ones hurried to get on their hats, and the usual solemn frivolity of their daily routine claimed their elders.

Louisa and Joanna Carnoustie never really did anything — that is to say, they never achieved anything. They pecked at the outer rind of various pursuits, but drew from them no strengthening juices, no inspiring cordials.

Even when they read, their understandings were scarcely enlightened, and they never read for very long at a time. As it was their parents' wish that a portion of each day should be devoted to the study of some improving book, Louisa, who was the most conscientious on the subject, would indeed take down the heavy volume which had been prescribed, and settle herself with her back to the light — an attitude also prescribed by dear mamma — but she had her eyes on her watch as she drew to the end of every page; and as half an hour had been the period allotted, not one half-minute beyond the half-hour would she yield her dull, uncongenial task. Left to herself, she would never have opened a book.

Joanna, equally lacking intellectual fire, was cleverer than her sister in devising opportunities for evading the maternal injunc-

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tion. 'Dear mamma does not mean us *always* to read, only she likes us to make a habit of reading,' she would say. 'I have really hardly time this morning,' and so it happened on many mornings.

How either of them got through the day it would be hard to determine. They pottered in and out. The one would chirrup at the piano — Louisa's singing was of the chirruping order — the while the other dabbled in her colour-box, and painted over and over and over again the same little landscape and the same bit of the landscape — because Joanna never could use a decided blue or brown at the first, but must needs always wash it in faintly to see what it looked like, with the result that if found satisfactory it was deepened by successive coats till it was sometimes startlingly strong in shade, with a tendency to manifold indistinct edges, — or if the primary wash did not upon trial take the fair artist's fancy, it would be extinguished by something else that did. Joanna's drawings were not, therefore, of extraordinary value.

The sisters had also long pieces of needlework invariably in hand. People said that had they lived in bygone times, when tapestry was the fashion, they would contentedly have plied the needle all day and every day, and left behind them some one thing for posterity to point to as theirs.

But the embroidery which was regularly taken out and as regularly laid by at certain hours by Louisa and Joanna did not attain the dignity of tapestry. It was only 'work.' Lady Carnoustie never spoke of it but as 'work.' 'Fetch your work,' she would say when in a chatty humour, and 'Put by your work,' when the conference was at an end; and if anyone had inquired of her for what purpose the long roll which was pinned up at the one end and covered with silver paper at the other was designed, she would have had to pass on the inquiry.

The needlewomen themselves valued their employment because it was employment and a vehicle for conversation, rather than because of its ulterior end. Usually it was for a bazaar — that was all they knew about it. Dear mamma liked them to work for bazaars, and they sent for the materials to a shop in Edinburgh at which dear mamma usually dealt.

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When we have added that a considerable portion of the Misses Carnoustie's time was spent in gossiping with their old nurse, in whose cosy parlour one or other was constantly to be found, and in retailing what they learned there to father or mother, or both, we have said all that there is to say about them. They were perfectly satisfied with themselves and their lot. They hoped that in time Mina would grow to be the same.

At present Mina was only in training. She was still to be considered incomplete. She would persist in spending so much of her time out of doors; she would not sit down to study, or to music, or to drawing, as soon as breakfast was over; she did not think of bringing in little pieces of news, even when she was afoot and abroad; she, in short, idled.

But then Mina was so young. It was only natural that Mina should still be half a child.

That being the case, Mina and Penelope were as well out of the way on the morning in question, for Louisa had a great deal to do. She had to take the opinion of the house upon the latter; and this important task would have received no furtherance from the former.

The person to be interviewed was, of course, Mrs. Alison, the housekeeper; Alison being only second in consequence to Lady Carnoustie herself in the estimation of the family, whom she had faithfully served for five-and-thirty years. She had come to the castle when Louisa was born, had discharged the duties of nurse as long as there was a nursery to preside over — and the nursery days had been elongated for her sake — and finally had come to be styled 'housekeeper.' Albeit, her real function was that of family councillor, arbitrator, dictator, and judge.

She alone would ever dare to think her mistress in the wrong, or to assert her poor timid colourless nurslings in the right, whenever any shadow of a difference arose. She alone defended their dignity and upheld their authority in the eyes of the Carnoustie world.

Within the four walls of her own little sanctum, it is true, she would rate them both soundly when, as not infrequently happened, they would displease her by their lack of self-assertion and their inaptitude for the position which was theirs by right.

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But although when well secured against intrusion, she would roundly tell both 'Louisy' and 'Joanney' what she thought of them in her own homely and most trenchant phraseology — at which they never took the least offence — no courtier inducting a novice into his duties in a royal palace could have inculcated in outer circles more profound respect for the blood royal than could Mrs. Margery Alison for every living representative of the Carnoustie line.

That there was no heir to the title, and that it must needs become extinct on the demise of its present possessor, was the secret grief of her heart, too deep rooted to be ever spoken about; but she had another rankling sore which, since it was capable of being rectified, was less easily borne in silence.

Why did her young ladies not marry?

Why were they not gay, proud, fashionable belles who would have brought the men in flocks to the castle, when they might have had their pick of the best, wedding in their proper rank, and being sent forth with great glory and honour to homes of their own? 'Oor rank is *barons*,' she had once replied with infinite dignity and decision, Joanna having mildly made merry on the subject.

'Barons are not so plentiful, Ailsie.' The old nursery name was still retained.

'Humph!' retorted Ailsie. 'They dinna look oor gait, ony way,' she added, sourly. In private she always spoke of 'us,' and 'oors.' She called her master 'oor fayther,' and her mistress, 'mammaw.' She had no hopes, no fears, no feelings, but as regarded them and theirs.

'What for dinna ye gang aboot as ithers gang?' she would demand, still thinking of the flocks of bachelor barons who were no doubt loose in the world if only her bairns had the wit to find them — 'what for do we no hae mair comp'ny, if ye maun bide at hame? There's naebody comes noo. I mind the day when we had a' the rooms full, and sic goin's on — but noo there's never a bed aired, wi'oot it's for McWhinnock, or McFadyan; and the best dinner service ne'er gets used, nor yet half the siller. It's no likely for sic as thae. *They*'re nae guid to us; what for do they come? It's no *them* we want; it's fowks like

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oorsels. The big dish-covers hanna been used for a twalmonth!' resting her chin on her hands, and rocking slowly backwards and forwards in her chair, as was her habit when lamentations prevailed.

Louisa and Joanna did not quite like these insinuations.

They knew very well what was meant and who was aimed at; and they did not think it fair that dear mamma should be made to bear the brunt of their spinsterhood. It was, they told themselves, the will of Providence that they had remained single so far, and if they should never marry, it would undoubtedly be because it was best for them not to marry, — which was in one sense very true, and in another altogether false; since marriages are no more made in heaven than are all earthly arrangements of any nature; and since if it be unlawful to debar our sons from getting on in the world by placing them where advancement is impossible, or at any rate improbable, it is surely no less so to put a barrier between our daughters and possible spheres of domestic happiness.

Old Ailsie had a far keener perception of the truth than any of them, when she grunted and grumbled, as year after year passed, and the massive silver dinner service, with its appropriate tankards and goblets, its huge candelabra and gigantic salvers, lay shrouded in their green baize coverings, no guest worthy of their gracing the board having appeared at the castle; and she was moreover perfectly correct in ascribing to Lady Carnoustie's selfishness, even more than to Lord Carnoustie's indolence, the present state of deterioration from the old *régime*.

When they were younger the two had not by any means shunned society. They had not been a gay couple; they had always detested town life, even when considering it due to their position to pass a few months of each year either in London or in Edinburgh, (more frequently in Edinburgh, which was more easily got at, and where there was an old house to go to); but they had issued a fair number of invitations while thus absent, which had resulted in the autumn season at Carnoustie Castle being as lively and festive as anyone need have wished.

Those times were what old Ailsie desired to have back again. She had seen them gradually wane in splendour; had marked

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how slowly but surely the festal occasions dwindled; how the guests diminished in numbers and deteriorated in rank; how every now and then an autumn would pass without the annual dinner party, for which the great covers came out; how the principal spare rooms grew to be one after another disused; how every pretext for putting off a proffered visit which entailed state and ceremony was clutched at; how Lord Carnoustie would say, 'Tut, tut!' when informed that some distinguished family connection, or college contemporary would be passing his way, and would be glad to trespass on his hospitality — and would as likely as not conclude that the offer was 'inconvenient,' and despatch a reply to that effect; how Lady Carnoustie would reluctantly confess that they really *ought* to ask such and such an old friend, who had been always in the habit of coming, and would expect it — yet would make so much of the infliction, and be so gloomy and harassed whenever the subject cropped up, that her dutiful Louisa and Joanna would beg to be allowed to write and explain that dear mamma was hardly up to visitors just then; — all of this Ailsie, as we say, observed with her keen, watchful eyes, and over it the faithful soul had many a silent heart-ache.

Had anyone been really ill — but no one was ill at all. Had there been any question of poverty — but money was more plentiful than it used to be. Quiet country life is very inexpensive after the income has reached a certain point; and no squandering sons or extravagant daughters made a tradesman's bill an ugly sight at Carnoustie Castle.

They all knew what they had to spend; and seldom spent it. Wherefore lack of means was not the drag on the wheel.

No, it was simple selfish passivity — if there be such a word. One wants a stronger word than 'inactivity,' a word that shall present an inch-by-inch growth of slovenly decay, bemusing all the faculties, and benumbing every nerve.

Lord Carnoustie hated to have put on any other dress coat than the shabby loose one with the shiny back, in which he could slouch comfortably into his arm-chair after dinner; he hated to have to talk on the events outside his own ken while he was at dinner; he hated to have to sit up later than his wont; worst of

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all he hated to have to step downstairs the next morning, and read prayers, with the feeling that *someone was there* — someone to whom he would have to say 'Good morning,' and of whom he must presently inquire whether or not porridge would be agreeable for breakfast?

But Lord Carnoustie was only second in command. Had her ladyship desired to receive company, she could and would have overruled his objections. It was her doing that the monotonous months and years slipped by and brought with them only an occasional insignificant guest, such as a former governess, or the family lawyer, or others of like status and intimacy, who knew them all and their ways so well that there was no need to change an iota of the jog-trot routine into which they had fallen; whose presence never mutely drew a contrast between the present and the past. To Lady Carnoustie was due the nipping in the bud of this and that proposal which might have pulled upright the tottering family prestige once more; and over her delinquencies, accordingly, old Ailsie brooded on her gloomy days, when Louisa's cheek-bones seemed to her to be thinner and sharper than ever, and Joanna's once fair skin to be sallow, and her once clear eyes lustreless. 'They hanna had their chance, puir weans!' quoth she to herself, and the more pitiful she felt, the more peremptory would be her tone towards them, supposing they came her way, and an opening for animadversion offered itself.

In person Mrs. Alison was tall and strongly built; her back was broad and straight, and her waist ample. On either side of her shrewd middle-aged countenance, the iron-grey hair was smoothly combed, and her cap was a work of art. No other cap like it existed on the island.

Among the servants she was not popular, so long as they were the servants, subject to her sway and restive beneath her authority. Her attitude towards them was that of an anxious-minded, suspicious watchdog, ever on the alert against mischief; convinced that they were, without exception, a worthless crew; and jealous of any more favourable verdict on the part of others.

But once beyond the bounds of Carnoustie Castle, there was

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not a sly butler nor a ne'er-do-weel footman, not a frowsy housemaid nor depredatory cook, but was to be found some time or other sitting by Mistress Alison's fire, and tasting of her teapot. She had no real hardness of heart — indeed she was soft when she might well have been harder. A wheedling word, a coaxing 'Eh, noo, Mistress Alison, I was daft to see ye again,' would send all the wrinkles from her face in a twinkling, and ensure better treatment at her hands than the flatterer in many instances had cause to claim.

One favourite, however, she had, who was always out of favour, but who encroached more and presumed more on his dubious position than anyone else would have dared to do on one more assured — and this was the idiot Tosh.

Who knew the way to the little side door leading to the housekeeper's own little domain better than Tosh? Who sniffed the fragrance of the hot jam afar off, when the great brass pan was on the fire and the froth was being 'scummed,' and who found a little jampot full of the same delicious 'scum' set aside for him when he tapped at the door and put his head inside, with his 'Ony thin' for me the day, mistress?' the while his greedy eyes went straight to the well-known corner? Who came whimpering with a bleeding finger and a burnt skin to be scolded and put to rights by the cleverest woman in the whole country round? Who got his feet toasted and his poor soaked clothes dried for him, and a hot drink poured down his throat, many and many a howling winter day when the storm was cruel and fierce, and the big helpless man a mere plaything for it to sport with?

Ailsie would be openly kind to Tosh then. No 'Gae 'wa wi' ye for a greedy gutsy loon!' for him on those occasions. Instead, she would extend both hands to pull inside the feeble, shivering form, pitifully seeking shelter and consolation; and whilst he was busy with bowl and spoon, the good soul would go about muttering to herself, 'The Lord's afflicted ane! The puir cratur! The Lord forbid we should turn awa' His ain afflicted!' whereupon the poor fool would look up from the hearthrug on which he was joyfully seated, crooning his satisfaction before the fire, and nod at her with a kind of dumb devotion too deep

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for words, and would cheerfully have laid down his life for her sake (without very well knowing what life was) after he had had his supper.

CHAPTER VII.

MINA VINDICATES HERSELF.

'Alas! that one is born in blight!'—EMERSON.

'I THINK naethin' o' the maid!'

Miss Louisa had seated herself, and intimated that she was ready to hear what Ailsie had to say.

The summer sun shone brightly into the housekeeper's room, but there was still a small fire in the grate, for one was rarely dispensed with all the year round either by Mrs. Alison or her mistress.

'A bit fire,' as Ailsie said, 'was cheery;' and sunshine, even June sunshine, in the Highlands of Scotland has seldom such warmth as to make a couple of blazing logs superfluous and unwelcome, especially during the morning hours.

Ailsie's taste was to have her window open and a brisk fire of mixed wood and peat crackling up the chimney. It was, as she said, 'cheery,' and it was, moreover, available for the small businesses she undertook in the way of cookery. Jams and jellies and sweet wines were concocted in the snug apartment; together with damson cheese, crystallised crab-apples, barberries, and other quaint and delicious compounds which it was Mrs. Alison's delight to prepare, and which were seldom seen in other houses.

Ailsie had a genius for cookery, as she had a genius for everything. Had she not been a nurse, she might have been a *chef* of the first water; or she might have been a laundress, for did not her ladyship's own woman coax Mistress Alison into washing her ladyship's finest old cobweb lace, which her less skilful fingers trembled to touch? or she might have been a milliner, for every cap she wore was her own construction, and

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the cap was peculiar to herself, and 'set' her homely brow as assuredly no other would; or she might have been, so said the old lord her master, a naturalist, for she knew the note of every bird that sang, and was the first to hear the hum of the honey-bee or the bleat of the new-born lamb. Nay, she was a conchologist, an entomologist, a collector of herbs and flowers beneath her feet, and a humble observer of the firmament above her head. It was all of this which served to make nurse Alison the power she was. Her mind was ever at work; her faculties never slumbered.

During the progress of her young ladies' education she had picked up innumerable little arts and trades from the foreign governesses who from time to time held rule in the schoolroom. They tried to teach Louisa and Joanna French darning and German hair-weaving. Louisa and Joanna could not learn; but nurse Alison did. The mademoiselles and fräuleins began by sneering at the old Scotchwoman's dialect, protesting they could not understand her, and holding aloof from any sort of friendly intercourse. But they did not long hold Ailsie cheap.

'*Ma foi!* She is *merveilleuse.* She is *affreusement sage.* She is like de wind. *Assurément la vieille est une femme savante,*' they would exclaim with uplifted hands by-and-by; and a word of praise or a look of approbation from her on her part would be rated at a very high value indeed.

For they soon came to perceive that Ailsie saw through and through them; and, as a matter of fact, the stamp set by Ailsie upon man or woman who came to Carnoustie Castle, whether it were accepted at the outset or not, was that which they ultimately were sure to bear to the end of their days in the eyes of those who dwelt there. It was, therefore, as we may perceive, of the highest importance to all that Ailsie's opinion of Penelope East should now be taken.

'I think naethin' o' the maid.'

Ailsie was in a 'thrawn' humour, as it chanced. She knew well enough that Miss Louisa had not come to talk about the maid, but the mistress. But she had Marie on her mind, and felt that, as she would herself have said, of Marie she 'bit' to speak.

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She now made a face, supposed to be Marie's. Louisa could not but smile at the contortion.

'Oo! She's been in here.' Mrs. Alison put one hand on the top of another, and executed a mincing step. 'She's been, and she's lookit into every corner, an' says she, "Nise leetle place," says she (mimicking with primmed up lips). "Nise leetle place! So very convenient," she says. Thinks I, "It's no gaun to be very convenient for *you*, if that's what ye're after." I kenned what she meant fine. "A nise little window to sit in," says she next, giggittin' up to the window. "Very pretty view," says she. "Oo, aye," says I, "it's a bonny view for them that has the time to look. I canna say I hae muckle consairn wi' views mysel'. I hae na the time to fash wi' the likes o' them."'

No one thought more of her outlook than Ailsie did, and many an hour she spent in her window-chair. 'For ye ken that was what she wanted, Miss Louisy,' proceeded she, grimly. 'For me to say she was to come ben and sit hersel' doun, whenever she had the fancy; and — but stop a wee, hear what neist. "We're always used to being in the country a part of the year," says she, condescending like a princess, "but it's rather early for us to come in June. London was very full," says she. "Indeed?" says I. "It was a peety to leave it, ye'll be thinkin'." "It could na be helpit," says she. "My certie!" thocht I, "ye're no blate. It could na be helpit!" I ups and says, "'Deed, an' what for cam' ye then? Gude sakes! *we* didna want ye."'

'Oh, Ailsie, I hope you did not say that?'

''Deed, an' I did, for I was that vexed to hear her. And there she was a' the time, smirkin' and snickerin', and as fu' o' airs as a peacock, — an' me in my auld goon!'

The truth was out. She had been caught by the inquisitive Frenchwoman before she was prepared; and Louisa could now comprehend a change of front which had puzzled her hitherto; for previously Ailsie had been even enthusiastic over the prospect of having a gay young English visitor with a smart maid; foreseeing a temporary revival, if nothing more, of old times through their means.

A young lady of suitable position and fresh from the great

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world coming to make a sojourn of six months at the castle? It had seemed almost too good to be true.

People now rarely offered themselves. If they did, it was but for a day or two. And only very, very few were invited. Those few being, moreover, of the same order as the Carnousties, not dashing, lively, modern; not, what was still more to the purpose, *English*. Ailsie had a great reverence for, and no little dread of *English* visitors. She liked to feel the dread; it put her on her mettle. She had perfect confidence in her powers and faith in what her family could do, if once they were minded to do it. Wherefore it was no pleasure to her, but rather pain, sharp and humiliating, to hear when company was expected, that it was not company for whom she need put herself out of her way; not gentlefolks habituated to splendour and fashion, for whom the butler must learn the newest mode of dressing the dinner-table, and the footman of folding the napkins.

In her heart the worthy dame had often hankered after the Easts.

The Easts were certainly not the Carnousties; they had no long roll of ancestry to point to — no ancient title to take pride in, — but they had something their Scotch cousins lacked, and something which Ailsie, the nurse, greatly prized. She knew not the word, but she knew the thing — *aplomb*. All her life (her real life only dated as far back as her reception into the Carnoustie family) she had fretted over this absence of *aplomb* in her beloved ones; she had a conviction that the want of it made them partially what they were.

More than once she had hinted — indeed, said outright — that Mr. East and his daughter should be invited to the castle.

'Is there no word o' askin' thae Easts?' she had demanded of Louisa or Joanna every now and then, after a brooding fit.

Louisa or Joanna always had an answer ready. Either Mr. East was too busy in London, or Mr. East and Penelope were gone to the country.

'Humph!' Ailsie would reply, dissatisfied and incredulous. 'He's no sae thrang but he wad come an he was budden,' — or, 'They're no gaen sae faur, but they could come this gait an we cared to hae them.'

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'Well, I don't know that we do particularly care to have them,' the young lady would rejoin cheerfully. 'What makes you yourself want them, Ailsie?'

'It's no them — it's sic as them;' Ailsie, with her chin on her hand, would sit and glower into the fire. 'If we hanna oor ain folks, we tak' up wi' ither folks,' she suddenly exclaimed one day; but she did not explain this oracular sentiment, and poor Louie, at whom it was levelled, was at a loss to imagine what her dear old nurse could possibly mean.

Ailsie had been radiant throughout the week before Penelope came.

Every smouldering feud had been buried, and every grievance tacitly condoned, in order that the castle and its inmates might be at their best for the young lady from the south; and the very emphasis which Lady Carnoustie laid upon her young relation's being a 'London girl,' in order to prevent anyone's thinking too much and expecting too much of her, was balm to the heart of the homely old woman in the back regions.

She had not only her long-established reasons for blessing heaven that had brought this advent to pass; she had, deep down in her heart, a new, intangible, dimly outlined, fearful and terrible reason as to which she would have torn out her tongue rather than give utterance.

It was after all but a vague blind fear.

As soon as she heard the news, and had put a few questions in order to satisfy herself as to Penelope's age, position, and expectations, she looked and felt happier than she had done for long.

'We'll be busy then,' quoth she, cheerily. 'Things maun be seen to, if she's to be here o' Friday, an' this is Saturday. It's no a week. Deed we maun stir oor stumps. She'll hae the blue room, maybe?' suggestively. 'The blue room is no sae — sae unco large' — it was one of the largest rooms in the house. 'An' it's near hand Miss Mina's; they'll be keen to be thegither. Tell mammaw I'm thinkin' the blue room wull be the ane she'll order; and Marget maun see to get it aired a' the week.' Anon it had been. 'We'd best gie the maid a guid room tae. See, noo, — see noo, dearie, that mammaw gies the maid a guid room. A room up the same stair. She'd

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best to be wi' oor lassies. Let her and her young leddy an' — an' Meeny — be thegither. It'll be best — I'm tellin' ye it'll be best,' she repeated earnestly; and when Louisa, somewhat surprised, yet willing to humour any little whim of her good Ailsie, proceeded forthwith to carry out her behest, and returned with her petition granted, she stroked her nursling's shoulder, took her hand and fondled it, and Louisa could almost have believed the voice which thanked her, quavered. It was odd of Ailsie to care so much about such a little thing.

Ailsie had called Mina into her sanctum the day before the arrival of the southerners. Mina was not to be found there as often as her sisters; nor, when she did enter, did she settle herself down for the length of time they often did. Both Louisa and Joanna had a leisurely way of lifting their front skirts and letting their ankles warm by Ailsie's fire, while they 'havered' of things past, present, and to come, no calls or occupations claiming them once the door of the little room was shut, — but Mina was neither so 'free' nor so leisurely.

She was fond of her old nurse, as they all were. She never neglected or slighted her; but especially of late years — it might have been since the Etheridge episode — she had cared less to talk over family affairs with Ailsie or with anyone than formerly; and had seemed to find in her own thoughts all the companionship she needed. Solitary rambles had become a necessity of her life.

It was with some reference to these, and to other habits of reserve, that the nurse rejoiced over the coming of Penelope East, and on her knees thanked Providence for having sent help in hour of need. She had, as we have said, on the day preceding Penelope's arrival, summoned Miss Mina, having arranged a trifling excuse for doing so; and Mina had obeyed, though not with so good a grace as usual.

'Tiresome!' she had muttered, when Louisa delivered the message. 'How troublesome of her to want tablecloths marked on a day like this! Can she not wait till to-morrow or next day? Ailsie seems to have *always* tablecloths in need of marking,' drumming with her fingers on the window-sill.

'Oh, I should go, if I were you, Mina,' exhorted her sister.

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'It is so *tiresome* of her,' repeated Mina.

'They will soon be done; there are not many; they won't take any time.'

'How many? I dare say there are a number.'

'No, indeed. It seemed to me it was hardly worth her asking you; and indeed I did offer to do them myself, but evidently she did not think that would do at all. I suggested Joanna, as the artist of the family, since Ailsie is so particular; but she said "No, it was 'Meeny' she wanted;" and when she said "Meeny" I knew she meant to have her way, and it was no use fighting her.'

Mina had gone; she, too, had recognised the force of 'Meeny'; it was only when unusually urgent or imperative that Ailsie thus spoke.

Mina had been very quiet and docile once within Ailsie's dominions. She had marked the half-dozen new damask table-cloths spread before her with even more pains than usual, being very careful to have the correct number of spikes and balls on the baron's coronet by which the letter C was surmounted; and she had listened to Ailsie's babble about coronets, and barons, and old families, with their privileges and responsibilities—all of which had been heard many times before, and which had only the one well-worn meaning—without once cutting short the strain; but Ailsie had been shrewd enough to perceive that none of it was taking hold, and that the young lady's thoughts were elsewhere.

Cautiously, therefore, she had approached the real object she had at heart.

'Noo, Meeny, dearie—there, that's them a', and thank ye; there's nae mair, wi'oot ye wad just mark me thae fower pocket-nipkins o' my ain. Oo, jest M. A.—Margery Alison. It's a' they need, an' tak' nae trouble. M. A. Onywhaur 'll do.' Ailsie would be both meek and grateful when anything of her own was in question, though critical as the veriest connoisseur in the case of the coroneted 'C.' 'Ay, that'll do fine,' proceeded she, eyeing the initials marked on the first pocket-handkerchief—'that'll do fine. But noo, Meeny, I hae ae thing to say, an' ye mun hearken, my dawtie. Here's a com-

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panion for ye at last a comin'. Here's a young leddy o' yer ain rank — and years — an' a'. Dinna flout her;' impressively, 'dinna haud awa' frae her. Ye ken yer fayther and mither's no like ither fowk; they wunna jist see things. They're no minded to tak' heed that bairns like you ——'

Then Mina spoke.

'I'm no longer a "bairn,"' she said; and her delicate nostril rose and fell. She was breathing quickly.

'Na, ye're no a bairn, but they canna see't,' said Ailsie, quickly. 'Yer sisters hae stayed bairns; they're jist as they were mony, mony years syne. They ken nae mair, they've lairnt nae mair, than then they knew. They'll never grow noo; they're ower auld. But what are they? Bairns — jist bairns; nae mair and nae less. Wae's me that my tongue suld say it o' them!'

'I know it,' said Mina, bitterly; 'and they would willingly see me the same. They are satisfied to live on here, winter and summer, summer and winter; doing the same things, plodding on round and round the same old track. If I ever say a word — express the slightest wish to break through this dead, dreary existence and *live* — they look at me so! Then they talk to me, and wonder how I can be so ungrateful to dear mamma, and assure me they would not have dear mamma know for the world, and that papa and mamma would be so disturbed and shocked. And you know, Ailsie, that it is true what they say — that is the worst of it — it is true, every word. If once mamma were to realise that I am not the simple childish thing she fancies me, she would grant neither me nor herself an hour's peace. She would watch me, worry me, wear me out. She would insist on knowing where I go on my walks, what I do, whom I speak to,' —

— 'Maybe sic watchin' wad no be sae muckle amiss,' quoth the nurse, drily.

'It would be amiss; I could not bear it. I must be free. And if I were to be imprisoned ——'

Her chest heaved.

Ailsie put her hand before her mouth and coughed softly. Then she shot a glance.

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'I'm no blamin' ye; an' ye ken weel I'll no let on; but, Meeny, my bairn, it's — it's no like yer fayther's dochter to ——'

The speaker paused, caution prevailing.

'To what?'

'Oo, naethin, naethin. Naethin — wi'oot it's that ye're maybe a wee thing less carefu' o' *what folks think* than micht be,' nervously smoothing the heap of folded linen on the table with her wrinkled hand. 'It's no likely ye wad stop to consider folks' tongues, but I wadna gie them a handle, Meeny,' earnestly; 'I wadna, indeed, my bairn. Dinna gang aboot yer lane as ye hae been doin'! Dinna be up on the hillside yer lane i' the gloamin'. Folks ask, "What for is ane o' oor young leddies aye stravagin' roon the hill-taps, her lane?" There's queer fowks aboot, an' whae kens wha ye micht fa' in wi'? Gif they kenned na ye was Lord Carnoustie's dochter, they micht mak free to speak t'ye, ——'

'Is that all?' Mina jumped from her chair, and shook the old woman playfully by the shoulder. 'You old goosey,' she laughed. 'Why, I never come across a human being when I am strolling over the moors, unless it is Torquil Macalister looking after his sheep. I asked Torquil to see me home once or twice, when I had gone rather further than I meant, and there were tinkers about — perhaps that gave rise to talk. I was seen with somebody, and they thought it was one of the tinker people. But it was only Torquil. However, I won't go so far again. You are quite right, Ailsie dear; I'll be more careful and keep nearer home. Only, like the dear old Ailsie that you are, don't go and say anything to any of them. You know I simply *can't* go pottering round and round the garden and greenhouses, like Louie and Joan; I must burst away somewhere — anywhere,' — she stopped abruptly.

'Mammaw would be wild if she kenned, Meenie.'

'That's just why she mustn't ken, Ailsie.'

'She aye thinks ye're jist roon by the farm or the byre.'

'I am there — sometimes.'

'No the times she thinks. An' she tells a' body ye're just a bit simple bairn ——'

Mina laughed. It was not a pleasant laugh to hear.

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'Ye're deceiving yer parents, lassie.' Some sternness was perceptible in the speaker's tone. Had it been either of the elder sisters sternness would have been manifested long ago. 'Ye're no straicht wi' them; whiles it gars me grue to hear ye blawin' i' yer mither's lug wi' tales o' this thing an' that, when weel I ken ——'

'Oh, you ken — you ken!' The light form bounded upright. 'You ken you have made up a bogie to frighten yourself with,' cried the speaker. 'Go, hunt the gowk, and you'll find what a silly old thing you are, bothering yourself with all this nonsense! I have other things to think of than this old rankle. You know, Ailsie, it is as old as the hills ——'

— 'It's auld in some ways: it's new in ithers ——'

'No, no: nothing of the kind. Don't you be starting that idea, you foolish Ailsie. Mind you don't. There is nothing new — nothing. I am going to have a new companion, that's all. And now I must go and make ready for her,' — and she had run out of the room gaily; and Ailsie had heard her fly through the back door, and seen her vanish in the woody slopes below. Had anything been gained by the interview?

Penelope had been formally introduced to the old nurse within an hour of her arrival at the castle — indeed, before she was allowed to go to her room and rest — and had been graciously received. Had Marie, the maid, not upset everything for the nonce by her untimely intrusion before Mistress Alison had donned her better gown and cap, both visitants would have received excellent judgment at her hands.

She had meant to like Penelope, and did like her. Penelope had held out her little frank hand, and said 'How d'ye do?' easily — Penelope always shook hands with everybody — and the sisters, who all three had escorted in their guest, timidly hoping, yet scarcely daring to hope, that she would realise all that Ailsie was to them, were astonished and relieved in a moment.

They would have been shy, and stiff, and miserable, even when desirous of being most gracious towards the unknown dependant of another noble house. Penelope had sat down and chattered, noticing everything in the room, and turning her little

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friendly face hither and thither with an interest and good-will that had carried all before it.

Mrs. Alison's serious smile had been bent upon the girl with obvious approval; and Louisa had felt secure of a pleasant reception on the following morning, so that it was really rather too bad of the 'contramacious' old woman to go and put her off with mimicry of the French maid and complaints of her presumption. Even when the conversation could at last be brought round to Marie's mistress, Ailsie had nothing better to say than that Penelope was 'weel eneugh.'

Mrs. Alison had her moods as well as her mistress.

CHAPTER VIII.

UP THE BURNSIDE.

Along the sky in wavy lines
O'er isle, and reach, and bay,
Green belted with eternal pines,
The mountains stretch away. — WHITTIER.

'WHERE shall we go?' inquired Mina Carnoustie of her companion, as the two issued from the porch, and paused for a moment to consider the point.

'Where? Everywhere!' cried Penelope, with joyous impetuosity. 'I want to go into every single place — up and down — round and round — I want to know what it is all like.'

Mina smiled. She knew what it was like so well.

'Don't you *love* this beautiful home of yours, Mina?'

'It is very beautiful, isn't it?'

'Very; the most beautiful place I ever saw in my life. Those woody heights rising one above another, and the purple crags above; and those streaks of silvery waterfalls — and — and — oh, it is *all* beautiful — *all* delightful! It makes me want to dance — to run — to shout ——'

'Well, you are an enthusiastic girl,' said Mina, smiling again. 'I had no idea you would feel so, Penelope. I am very glad, you

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know. We who live here are accustomed to the old place, and, of course, we think there is no place like it in the world; but we don't expect everyone to feel the same. Now, which way shall we go?'

'If you ask me where I should *like* to go,' said Penelope, her sparkling eyes fixed upon a distant point, 'it is there'— and she pointed to a shining waterfall far up the rocky moor— 'I should like to start from the side of the brook, where it is brawling down below there in the hollow, and follow it up every inch of the way.'

'It will be rather rough walking.' Her cousin glanced at the delicate French print dress, which they had all admired at the breakfast table.

'I don't mind rough walking, if you don't,' replied Penelope.

'I don't mind anything. I wander about on the moors every day of my life, and I can pilot you up the glen, right up to the fall, and never leave the burnside for a moment. I am only thinking of your pretty frock.'

'Pooh! It'll wash. Marie is making me dozens. She has brought a bale of goods with her — we went to choose prints and ginghams directly I knew I was coming here — and she ran me up a couple to begin with. She is a very quick worker; she will keep me going. Now, then, for the burn — as you call it. I am going to call it a "burn" too. I am going to learn all your words and ways. You spoke of going up the "glen." Come along up the "glen," Mina,' laughing. 'Come; what are you waiting for?'

'Take this stick,' said Mina, who had stepped back into the hall and procured two strong walking-sticks. 'I did not know we were going on the moor, or I should have offered you one before. I always walk with a stick. Your boots are not very strong,' doubtfully.

'If you are going to take umbrage at my boots next,' cried Penelope, merrily, 'it is all up with me; I have no other kind of boots. Marie can't make me boots. So come along, and if the boots are cut to ribbons I dare say there is a man hereabouts who could ——'

'Of course. Look at mine,' extending a small well-shaped

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foot, fitted with a hob-nailed boot, a very carter's boot for strength and solidity, yet enchantingly neat withal.

Penelope shrieked with delight.

'Come to the man — the man who made that — come this moment,' cried she, seizing her cousin's hand. 'It is perfection; — absolute perfection! I never saw such a boot in my life. And what a sweet little foot you have! But the boot — the boot — I must have a boot like that this very instant.'

'But I thought we were going up to the moor this very instant.'

'Oh, well,' said Penelope, relaxing her hold, and smiling at herself. 'I must let the boot slide till to-morrow, or this afternoon. Now, what are you laughing at?'

'Partly at you, and partly at your "slide." If we use words you have never heard before, some of yours are new to us. I rather like them. What are they? Slang?'

'Slang? I don't know. Perhaps. I never thought about it. Do I speak slang? Was that what made your mother look at me once or twice rather curiously at breakfast? She does not approve of slang terms, I suppose.'

'She has never heard them,' said Mina, simply. 'None of us have. We have never heard anything. We never go anywhere. We know nothing about modern life.'

By this time the two were descending the slopes which surrounded the castle.

'We shall cross a little bridge down below here,' continued Mina, 'and the path on the other side of the burn will take us some way up the glen. After we leave it behind, it is still pretty easy walking as long as the burn is on a level with the moor, but when it plunges in between its rocky walls we shall have to plunge too. However, you can say if you wish to turn back. No; we know absolutely nothing about the world beyond our own little world, Penelope, and our own little world extends for about a dozen miles on either side of us. I will show you its extreme limits presently. It is as well you should be told this at once; it will save mistakes. My mother and sisters would never tell you, for this reason, that they don't know it themselves. *I* know it, but I am nobody here. It is surprising,

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isn't it? You look surprised. I thought you would, and that is why I want to keep your surprise to myself. It would not help you with us, and I think'—a slight flush mounted to the speaker's cheek as she hesitated, then proceeded slowly and with an obvious effort—'I should like to help you, Penelope.'

'You are a dear!' exclaimed Penelope, taking in the whole—the kindly intent, the effort, and the wisdom—in one flash of apprehension. 'Now, how could you think of all that at once, you clever creature? You perceive that I am likely to shock your people, but that I don't mean to shock them, and you don't want me to shock them. I understand it all. Of course, I want to get along comfortably, and one can't be expected to divine by intuition everything about everyone. But you will put me up to the ropes, won't you?'

'There! That is another,' said Mina, smiling again. 'You can't think how I like to hear you, Penelope. It is like a breath of fresh air—of fresh, *fresh* air. I am stifled here. Are you come, I wonder, to deliver me?' she continued, relapsing into her usual dreamy tone. 'I have often fancied what it would be to have a deliverer arrive. Perhaps you think I ought to deliver myself? But you don't know, you cannot imagine; no, I can't, I *can't*.' She shook her head mournfully, and a sigh burst from her bosom. 'I might once, but the time has passed,' she muttered beneath her breath.

'Am I a deliverer because I talk slang, and am likely to fall foul of your people's prejudices?' queried Penelope, staring a little. 'Well, if that's to be my *rôle*, I think I can promise to play it. It seems simple. But, you must know, I am not supposed to be a slangy girl, *not at all*,' with emphasis. 'If there is one thing on earth I can't abide, it is a regular slangy girl. I, in fact, I am very particular, Mina; extraordinarily particular, if you only knew it. I wish you heard the girls I hear! I should like to let loose one or two of them in your drawing-room and see what you would all think,' the cloud melting on her brow, for it had not been altogether agreeable to be taken for precisely the species of young lady she held most in contempt.

Penelope knew that this was an injustice. She might here and there let fall an expression or make use of an idiom new to

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Carnoustie Castle; but, then, by Mina's account, what would not be new there? The excitement of finding herself in such a novel sphere, and the trifle of nervousness induced by a suspicion that all she said and did was being pinned down, as it were, for closer inspection presently, had made her conscious of giving an impression of herself both on the previous evening and before the assembled party at breakfast, which was not quite the true one.

Mina's subsequent revelations had confirmed this intuition. For a few minutes she had felt vexed with herself and with everyone. Had she really caught the spirit of the age to the extent her cousin hinted? Had Lady Carnoustie's eyebrows been justly raised? And were the critics, who were now doubtless picking her to pieces behind her back, doing so upon perfectly reasonable grounds?

Reassurance, however, was at hand. She thought of various 'Queenies' and 'Tinys' and 'Girlies' she knew. It was enough. A vision of Tiny Bolitho prancing in before the august tribunal, in juxtaposition to Lady Carnoustie's long thin face, being raked by a fire of solemn, soul-searching interrogations, and withered by a blast of concentrated hatred and disgust, was more than human nature could resist; and having given vent to the wish that some such scene could take place, Penelope stood still in the middle of the little path and screamed with laughter.

'It would be so very funny,' she sobbed at last, wiping her eyes, and struggling for breath. 'So very, very funny! Mina, have you any idea how funny it would be?'

'No,' said Mina, quietly. 'I don't think I have. My ideas don't run to anything much funnier than — can you guess?'

'Oh, than me!' said Penelope, promptly. 'I dare say. Well, I'll do my best. But I warn you, I am nothing to Tiny Bolitho. I am simply nowhere beside her; not in it, you know. However, *faute de mieux*, I will give you the fresh air you crave for, my dear cousin. And you, in return, what will you teach me?'

They had now reached the edge of the wood, which was bounded by a low moss-grown wall, and a wicket gate admitted foot passengers to the open moor beyond.

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On one side tinkled softly the wandering burn, clear as a diamond, and for the moment level with the peat-bog by which it was encompassed; on the other there rolled ridge upon ridge of broken moorland, now green with springing grass, now purple with budding heather; while far and near glittered the broad Atlantic, white in the blaze of the noonday sun, its glassy surface unbroken even by the long slow swell with which its bosom heaved.

A group of peewits fluttered up from the bog and circled round, crying. A heron flapped down to the edge of the stream, and settled on a rock.

Something in Penelope's face emboldened her cousin. She stole a second glance. This girl might talk slang, and wear French dresses, and have associates of whom she herself owned that it would be a jest of the first water to introduce them to Carnoustie Castle, but no one could gaze upon these rocky solitudes with the rapture painted on Penelope's brow without loving

to hold
Converse with Nature's charms, and view her store unroll'd.

(And if she loves Nature she loves poetry; and if she loves poetry,) 'Cousin,' said the Scottish maiden softly, 'you ask what I shall teach you. Shall I teach you this?'

At the same moment the figure of a man appeared on the heights above.

'Who is that?' said Penelope, pointing upwards, her attention diverted at once. 'Why, Mina, Mina!' breathlessly, 'how very interesting, how romantic! He is coming our way; we shall meet him if we go straight up; come along, do; it is the man I travelled with; I know him by the dogs.'

A couple of dogs had now gained the crest of the ridge as well as their master, and were plainly visible following at his heels.

'Are you sure it is your fellow-traveller?' replied Mina, picking her way among the moss-hags with the adroitness born of long practice. 'Because, if not ——'

'I tell you it is he. He was tall — like that. And he had two dogs — like those. It must be your Mr. Redwood — my

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long-coated, uninterested, unfriendly steamboat companion. I never told you *how* uninterested and unfriendly he was, however; I could not lower myself before the general public; but I don't mind confessing to you that a more objectionable back than that man had, I have never had the luck to behold. He set it at me like a photographing camera, too; wherever I was the back made a dead point. I grew quite afraid of looking its way. It seemed to see me, and not to like me. Such a back gets upon one's nerves at last.'

'So you saw nothing of him but his back? How are you certain it is he now?'

'For that very reason,' rejoined her cousin, readily. 'I only saw his back then. I only see it now. Oh, well,' impatiently, 'of course I do not mean I *only* saw it; don't lie at the catch, Mina, whatever you do,' parenthetically; 'but I do assure you that that unkind Mr. Redwood simply ignored my presence, though we two were alone on the deck for hours.'

'For hours? From Ardrossan here?'

'There you are! Lying at the catch again! It seemed hours to me; and if he had only knocked up an acquaintance, ever so slight an one, he might have made it ever so much shorter. Do let us hurry on. For the fun of the thing I want to meet him up here, in this solitary place where he can't turn his horrid back upon me, where ——'

'But how do you suppose he is going to know you again?'

Penelope's eyes opened. 'How? Why, of course he will. He might not know me *any*where; but, considering he saw where my luggage was addressed, and Marie and his valet were hobnobbing — for I saw them — and, besides, he knew well enough what I was like; he must have known; I believe he had a good look at me some time or other,' she concluded, panting and struggling among the moss-hags.

Mina said nothing.

'Where do you suppose he is going, Mina?'

'To cross the burn higher up.'

'On his way back to his own place?'

Mina did not reply. They proceeded in silence for some distance.

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At length, 'There he is again!' exclaimed Penelope in a lower voice. 'There! Don't you see him? He is behind that rock now! There! Coming our way! What a stride he has! Do you suppose he sees us, Mina?' drawing closer to her cousin. 'Don't let him see us till he is too close at hand to wheel round. I have an instinct that he would be off if he knew we, or, at any rate, I, were anywhere about. There! Did I not tell you? He *has* seen us, and he has stopped as if he had been shot! He is turning away now. I do call that rude,' indignantly. 'He was walking straight towards us, and to turn right round ——'

'You may ease your mind,' said Mina, tranquilly. 'That is not Mr. Redwood. It is only Torquil Macalister, my father's head shepherd, and he has diverted his course because he thinks it is not respectful to pass too near us.'

'Do you say that is not Mr. Redwood?' demanded Penelope, more aggrieved than relieved. 'And I had made it all out so nicely! I was quite pleased to have something more against him. Oh, but, Mina, I think you are wrong: that is surely a gentleman — not a shepherd. Look at his walk; and ——'

'It is Torquil, the shepherd,' repeated Mina. 'Do you think he looks like a gentleman? Other people have said the same, and I will tell you how it is: Torquil Macalister comes from the north — from Inverness-shire, I believe — and they are all gentlemen there. If you hear him talk, his speech is quite different from that of our people — from Lachlan, for instance, the other shepherd. Lachlan speaks exactly like the common man he is; but Torquil picks his words and pronounces them delicately, with something of a foreign accent. You must know this is not exactly the Highlands, Penelope.'

'I know. Your father explained it to me last night. But I am so disappointed that this is not Mr. Redwood. All the same, Torquil is rather a magnificent Torquil,' eyeing the retreating figure. 'I dare say he is taller than Mr. Redwood. Is that him calling?' as a loud musical note echoed and re-echoed over the moor.

'He is calling to his dogs,' said Mina. 'Torquil is the pre-

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siding spirit of the place, and scours these heights from end to end many times a day. You can seldom be here for any length of time without either hearing or seeing him. Hark! there is his voice again! And nearer. He is descending behind that knoll — do you see? — in order to avoid us. That is Torquil's manners. But if we were in any difficulty or danger he would rise out of the mist; he did so once for me ——'

She paused.

'What difficulty or danger could there be in a place like this?'

'The mist surrounded me; I was higher up than we are now. I was by myself, and I had wandered on, not noticing how far I had strayed. All at once I was enveloped; and somehow, though it had been simple walking and an open moor but a minute before, I found myself on the verge of a precipice, with a sheer descent below; another few steps, and I should have been over it.'

'How dreadful! And the shepherd saved you?'

'He rose out of the gulf, thrusting me back with his arms. He had scaled the face of the rock, suspecting I might be going too near the edge, for he had seen me go by; and he was just in time. We had to remain for over an hour where we were, until it was safe to attempt the descent, even for Torquil, who knows every mountain track and sheep run. I have never ventured up so high since.'

'Did they know about it at home?'

'Ailsie knew; no one else. Ailsie knows everything; but I have promised her not to be so bold again. Ailsie does not like my wandering about on these moors alone; and only a day or two ago she lured me into her room and delivered herself of a very solemn admonition on the subject; but I assured her I was safe wherever Torquil Macalister was. She is always afraid of my meeting strangers — sportsmen. It will be Mr. Redwood now,' with a smile.

'I am sure I wish it were Mr. Redwood.'

But at this point talking became impossible. The two entered a narrow gorge, from which on either side rose wet, mossy walls of rock, surmounted by a tangle of birch, ash, hazel, and rowan

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trees; while from the edge there drooped long trailing sprays of ivy and honeysuckle, the latter in full bloom. Deep pools of sullen water, on which the foambells were swinging round and round, were connected with each other by narrow clefts in the rock, through which the torrent hurried.

'Don't let your foot slip,' exhorted Mina Carnoustie, taking the lead; 'if ever you are not quite sure of your footing, lay hold of the roots or ferns above; lean towards the rock. Help yourself along as you see me do.'

Anon it was, 'Getting on all right, Penelope? I see you know how to scramble. Here we are at the first fall. Oh, look, Penelope! The sunlight has caught the upper part, and below all is in black shadow. Look how sharp — how strange the contrast!'

She paused abruptly. Penelope had not quite come up with her.

'It is like life,' murmured the poor girl to herself, 'at times so bright, so beautiful; then all at once, without a moment's warning — the light — goes — out.'

CHAPTER IX.

A JILT.

'A woman, in all times, hath been observed to be an animal hard to understand, and much inclined to mischief.' — *Le Dépit Amoureux.*

INVERASHET LODGE was in every respect a contrast to Carnoustie Castle. It was a square solid whitewashed building, with windows that looked ashamed of themselves, and a front door that sought to elude observation altogether.

Moreover, Inverashet had no situation to speak of. It was neither 'pleasantly situated,' nor 'romantically situated,' nor 'conveniently situated'; it was simply dumped down on the high road; and how to account for its being where it was,

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instead of in a dozen more likely places, was an annual puzzle to the estate agent who had the letting of it.

When desirable tenants assailed Mr. Macdonald with inquiries on the subject, he got over that part of the business as quickly as he could. How often his clerk had heard him thus begin! 'Frankly, I must own Inverashet is not an attractive looking residence. It is a good house; good, substantial, comfortable — but plain. It is not Carnoustie Castle, for instance. Carnoustie Castle is one of the finest places in the West of Scotland. But then, my dear sir' — Macdonald would buttonhole his man, and the clerk would recognise another turn of the game — 'my dear sir, what would *you* do with a place like Lord Carnoustie's? What *you* want is a good substantial plain house — not precisely a shooting-box — oh, no, Inverashet is not a mere shooting-box' (this was when his interrogator was a family man, with a number of olive branches to be stowed away) — 'Inverashet is a cut above that; it is' (again the same old terms, than which none more appropriate could ever be invented) 'a good — substantial — comfortable — plain house.'

Whether or not the outgoing tenant endorsed the description at the end of his lease Macdonald prudently did not inquire; he was ready with it afresh for the next one, and that was all he cared about.

To Mr. Charles Redwood, however, who was a young man and a bachelor, it had been owned that Inverashet was a shooting-box and nothing more. It was, as a matter of fact, not half nor a quarter as well appointed as many shooting-boxes are; and the agent had quaked internally when Redwood had said he would go down and look round before deciding.

Then a piece of luck, according to his views, had happened.

Redwood had reconsidered the matter, and, being anxious to get away from town for reasons of his own, had abruptly made up his mind, signed the lease, and intimated his intention of establishing himself at Inverashet by midsummer. He did not intend to wait for the shooting season to begin.

At his club they all knew why Charley Redwood did this, and talked the matter over quite openly among themselves. Charley was going away to get over it, they said (they talked of 'it'

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because everyone knew what 'it' meant). Charley had been deucedly ill-treated, they agreed; and the girl was a fool, and she might at least have chosen some other time of year to throw poor Charley over than right in the middle of the London season. It was jolly inconsiderate of the girl; and Charley was jolly well out of it.

To himself they adopted the tone of indifference. 'Got a nice shootin', eh, Charley? Lucky beggar *you* are! Goin' down to it at once? That's what I should like to do, if I could get away; London season's a jolly nuisance. You will have Scotland all to yourself, old chap, and put in some fishin' before the shootin' begins.'

Redwood had not thought of the fishing; indeed, was well aware that no salmon-fishing was to be had on his ground, but a happy idea grew out of the suggestion nevertheless. He would go sea-fishing. He would pull out into the sunset on a July evening, as the trawlers were stealing forth from the shadow of the lee shore to begin their night's work (he remembered the sight in his boyhood), and, in company of the simple fisher lads, would hang over the boat's edge with the hand-lines when there was a rumour of whiting on the bank; or he would bait the five hundred hooks of the long line, and haul in the flashing phosphorescent prey with something of the joyous excitement of those boyish times; or he would 'pay out' the drag-net round the mouth of some rocky bay — he could almost hear the soft slow thud of the oars breaking the stillness of the night — and be the first to dash overboard waist-deep, when once the circle was complete and the guileless fish entrapped; and shout with the rest over the glorious medley of sea-trout, cod, flounders, saith, lythe — all the 'catch' that presently should lie shining and gasping on the shore!

Yes, he would do this and forget Mary Duberly.

It was of Mary Duberly Redwood was thinking as he stood on the steamer's deck looking out to sea on the evening when he and Penelope East were alike nearing the end of their journey. He was thinking of the girl who had jilted him, — but he was also thinking that the girl on board must know that he had been jilted. Although she knew it not, he had travelled down

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from London in the train with this same fellow-passenger, and had avoided sitting opposite her at luncheon in the refreshment-room at Carlisle, for, being in that sensitive and irritable state which colours and distorts every common incident, he had fancied himself a target for her criticism and curiosity. She knew who he was — he was sure she knew who he was — and all about him. Confound her inquisitive eyes! It was too bad thus to track a poor fellow who was down in his luck, and only wanted to get out of everybody's sight and be let alone! What business was it of hers, this girl's, that another girl had made a fool of him?

Penelope, as we know, had never heard of Redwood, nor of his story; but there was no one to tell him so, or if there had been, he would probably have proved incredulous. He was very sore about himself.

And it must be admitted that the circumstances of the case warranted considerable bitterness of spirit, when it is explained that Redwood was no longer a very young man, that he was not a fast man, nor a pleasure-loving man, nor a man who went about the world and formed new acquaintances every day, and took life easily; but rather one for whom ordinary society had few attractions, who was at ease only among friends of his own sex, and afraid of nothing more than the blandishments of women.

His engagement had made all his little world laugh hugely. Charley, they said, was hooked at last. And that the hooking should have been effected by a smart little flirt who had had a dozen previous affairs, and who, it was expected, would lead her husband a dance, whoever he might be, added to the jest. They wished poor Charley joy, laughing in their sleeves as they did so.

Redwood, however, had accepted the congratulations in all good faith. It was suspected that he wanted to be married. He had lately come in for a moderate estate in a nice part of the country, and had cut the Foreign Office, in which he had been drudging for ten cheerless years; consequently it was opined that Mary Duberly had hit the right moment and found her task easy.

Possibly she, too, wanted to be married. At any rate, not

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three weeks after the news was given out, and in the very thick of the present-giving and letter-writing, the young lady suddenly changed her mind, vowed she had mistaken her feelings, hoped Charley would forgive her, and appeared radiant in the park, accompanied by a gentleman who was not Redwood.

A former lover had turned up unexpectedly; there had been a scene, and an explanation; the little feather-headed beauty had evinced more heart than anyone could have expected, albeit neither pity nor honour entered into the question, and the result was that Charles Redwood, with his comfortable rent-roll and honest devotion, was cast aside like an old shoe, to make way for a voluble interloper who had nothing but a handsome person and glib tongue to recommend him, who was detested by the men as much as he was admired by the women, and who thought it added vastly to the flavour of his conquest that it should have been obtained over a rival already in possession.

The mortification of having been ousted by such a fellow was as keenly felt by Redwood as it could have been felt by anyone.

He had not been very vehemently in love with Miss Duberly, but he had been sufficiently so to be happy in the prospect of wedding her; his friends' congratulations had, as we have said, been received with complacency; he had ordered diamond ornaments for his bride, and had sent down furniture to his home; he had enjoyed the whole thing; and when the crash came, he scarcely knew how to bear it. Not a man in his set but could have better endured to be jilted.

Redwood was not a talker; his life had been one to foster habits of silence; and he could hardly bring himself to mention the subject even to his most intimate friends. With a mighty effort — because it must be done — he had stated at last the bald facts to one or two, and left them to tell the rest; and to their credit be it spoken, scarce one of the circle but was sorry and angry, and railed against the little jade who had used a good fellow so, and hoped she would meet her just deserts some day.

They had laughed at poor Charley's so-called prosperity, not much believing in the genuineness of the article; but they did not laugh now. They looked at him with long kindly faces. It was to escape those faces that he fled to Inverashet.

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The reason for selecting Inverashet was that Redwood was well acquainted with other parts of the Hebrides, where he had spent many summer holidays; but the Isle of A. was entirely new to him. Furthermore, it was off the tourist beat. He would not have Charlton, or Templeton, or others of their kind, popping in to look him up on their way to this place or that, chock-full of London gossip, and curious to discover how far he had progressed towards recovery from his blighted hopes.

No one was likely to come near him, unless invited; and he did not issue any invitations.

He meant it to be understood that he wished to be let alone; and when the time for departure came he set off with as few 'Farewells' as possible, accompanied only by the quiet young man whom Penelope described as a valet, but who was in reality more of a groom, and by the two favourite dogs who had the run of Birdsall Grange, and whose dumb companionship might be something of a consolation at Inverashet.

For two or three days their master hardly wandered outside the precincts of his new abode. He had been longing for this solitude, for this release from effort, this immunity from keeping up appearances; and the peace and stillness around were like a healing balm applied to an open wound.

He had got away from the world; by the time he went back again — and he supposed he should go back some time — his unfortunate detestable story would have faded from men's minds, and he would be able to look people in the face again. This was Redwood's principal thought.

He did not grieve inconsolably over his loss as a lover; nor was this perhaps to be expected, considering the shabbiness of the whole proceeding. Miss Duberly had herself been in a great measure responsible for his proposal; she had lured him on; accepted him greedily; thrown him over shamelessly. He had even recognised in the chastened sympathy of his friends a covert opinion that he was well off his bargain.

Once or twice he had caught a glimpse of Mary herself; for he had not immediately fled the scene, having done nothing to flee for, and concluding that if he could brave his position for a short time, and then retreat in good order, throwing over his

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exit a veil of reasonableness, he would be acting with a show of spirit and wisdom; and the vision of his faithless flame in company with his supplanter, while it enhanced his mortification, did much to cure his regret. Then he set off for Inverashet.

On the third day after his arrival at Inverashet it rained. The wonder was that it had not rained long before, for there had been a preternatural clearness and brilliancy about the atmosphere for a whole week, which clearness, as the weatherwise know, is not a sign of lasting good weather, but rather preludes a swift and lamentable change.

A long morning in the house with nothing particular to do, and no morning papers to read, was a bad preparation for an afternoon similarly vacant; Redwood looked gloomily at the rain, and made up his mind.

'Wet or fine, I must go out,' he decided. 'It would be intolerable to be cooped up in this bare room the whole day. I'll take the dogs for a run, and go and have a look at the cairn on Lord Carnoustie's moor. On such a day he won't be out — nor will any of them.'

Accordingly, luncheon over, he donned his mackintosh and called to the dogs.

The air was fairly mild, and although sweeping mists encircled the hill-tops, there was nothing to daunt the spirit or chill the resolution, as Redwood, with his hands in his coat pockets and his cap well down over his ears, set off at a brisk pace. He found he rather liked the rain. It was refreshing.

It was something, too, to get out of the dismal smoky rooms and musty passages of the shooting lodge. He had felt infinitely colder and damper than he did now, while waiting within doors for the sky to clear, until a peat fire had enlivened the scene; but this had only caused an exchange of one misery for another, since the fire had made the small room unbearably hot.

His own thoughts, too, had been fed by inactivity. To be sure there were several small duties he might have performed; he might have written to Macdonald the agent, announcing his arrival and describing how he found the place. He had been well pleased, on the whole; and a word to this effect would have been gracious.

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Or he might have written to Birdsall Grange. There were divers matters awaiting his decision there, as to which he had really decided long ago; but it had been too much trouble to say so.

Or he might have ordered down the newspapers and books he wanted. Or the fishing tackle which had been forgotten.

There was a very fair morning's work for a lazy man lying undone,—work which would have kept at bay gloomy reminiscences, if it did nothing else; but Redwood, like many other people, when out of spirits cared only to mope.

Now, however, he felt insensibly cheered. The soft west wind lay gently against his cheek; the cool drops hung on his eyelashes, and trickled irresolutely over his chin; he did not mind either. A delightful glow was obtained by walking; and it was walking moreover, attended by no discomfort in the shape of mud or gutters. The heathery road was clean and smooth, and not a puddle defaced its porous surface, through which the moisture drained away.

On either side the little hill-flowers were in full sweet blossom, and their varied tints adorned the hill-sides.

On a sudden the cuckoo's note burst forth.

Redwood, who had by this time gained a point whence he could strike the sheep-track leading to the cairn which was the object of his walk, stood still to listen and look around.

'That is Lord Carnoustie's, I suppose,' said he to himself as his eye rested on a well-wooded domain, in the centre of which two massive grey turrets upreared themselves. 'I don't suppose Lord Carnoustie will trouble me. Landed proprietors don't often bother to call on mere shooting tenants. What a fine place it is! By Jove! I had no idea there would be such a place on the island!'—his gaze taking in the undulating park; the long sweeping avenues closed in by their ponderous gateways; the extensive lawns and gardens; and the large area covered by farm-buildings and gardeners' cottages. 'By Jove! that is just the sort of place I should choose for myself if I had enough to keep it up. What sort of a man is Lord Carnoustie, I wonder?'

Up to the present he had not taken one iota of interest in Lord Carnoustie. He had heard the name, and the name had

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conveyed nothing. But the sight of a noble and beautiful domain within a mile or two of his own humble quarters — especially now that he had been at the humble quarters for three days, during which time he had not set eyes on a single inhabitant of the neighbourhood above the rank of a keeper or fisherman — set alight a spark of curiosity and interest within his breast.

'I don't want to go to his house'; Redwood turned away. 'I wouldn't be paid to begin visiting and dining; but I should not mind his doing the civil, if it only extended to a morning call. Heigho! It does rain now.'

The clouds had descended lower, and were emptying themselves as by a fresh impetus.

'This is not so pleasant,' quoth our pedestrian, looking about for some tree or rock beneath which to shelter. 'It will soon go by, and I have lots of time before dinner to walk up to the cairn, so I may as well get in under somewhere. Ha! there is the very place!' espying a ruined tenement by the wayside, whose roof was still intact — one of those dwellings from which the occupants had been driven when the great tide of emigration swept over the Scottish Highlands, and which was now used as a shelter for cattle or sheep.

Thither Redwood hastened, followed by his dogs; indeed, divining by instinct his purpose, Duke and Poacher dashed headlong through the gaunt doorway before their master, and, diving into the recesses within, brushed with their wet coats a wayfarer quietly seated there, with an object that was apparently the same as their own.

CHAPTER X.

LORD CARNOUSTIE AT PLAY.

'He sometimes could descend to trifle too.' — CRABBE.

THE man did not rise nor touch his cap; so Redwood, contenting himself with a curt 'Wet day!' and a peremptory 'Come

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to heel!' directed to his dogs, remained in the stone arch of the doorway, taking no further notice of him.

He thought he had seen a grey-bearded old shepherd, or fisherman, in a suit of homespun. As a matter of fact he had seen Lord Carnoustie; and whatever might be his ignorance, Lord Carnoustie knew him in a moment.

'Ca' canny!' said the old peer to himself, not in the least resenting Redwood's 'Wet day!' of superiority. 'He will never know me, if I just sit still and hold my tongue. He thinks I'm a tramp. Let him! All I ask is that he may go on thinking so,' with grim satisfaction. 'Aye, aye, my loon,' apostrophising internally the long-coated back which had given such umbrage to Penelope, 'aye, aye; just you stand there — and let me sit still here — and as soon as this shower is over, we can each go our way, and de'il a bit the wiser will you ever be! I am not going to make friends in this way,' indignantly resenting the intervention of the elements, 'not I, indeed! Ca' canny! — that's the word for me.'

Accordingly he sat as still as a mouse.

The rain descended in torrents. 'It will be over all the sooner,' cogitated Lord Carnoustie, peering through the hole by his side which had once served for a window. 'It never lasts when it comes down like this. It is only a matter of a little patience;' and he folded his hands resignedly on the top of his stick, and cocking his eye at Redwood's unconscious form, meditated not without some sense of its humour on the situation.

'He has been driven out of doors for want of anything to do inside. Inverashet's a doleful place on a wet day. I dare say there is no one there but himself; and he is sick to death of his own company. They will stare when I tell them at home. My lady will think I ought to have introduced myself and asked him up; so I must just take heed and not let out too much; I need not say how long we have been here together sheltering. I can put it that he came in for a bit, and we were both very wet, and the time was not propitious for sociability. *He's* not wet, though,' commented the old man, running his eye half enviously over the long white mackintosh, 'I wonder how he can walk in a thing like that! Oh, you may blow your nose' —

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for Redwood had withdrawn one hand from his coat pocket for the purpose — 'you may blow your nose; but you needn't pretend there's anything in this weather to give anyone a cold. It's rain we want. We have had it far too dry of late; we have burnt up with dryness. There is always such an outcry if we have a few wet days,' — (a grievance of ancient date), — 'as if we had more rain in the west than they have everywhere else — when, as a matter of fact, I believe we have less. Now, here is this Englishman! I'll be bound he is saying to himself at this moment, "What a country for rain!" Whereas, if he had only come last week, or the week before, he might have seen days and days without!'

For a moment Lord Carnoustie was on the point of rising and accosting the stranger, in order to tell him so. He felt that he could so easily have put the matter on a proper footing: explained that the turnip fields were crying out for moisture, and that the crops would simply be ruined if the cloudless sunshine of the previous week had been maintained. When Redwood took off his cap and shook the raindrops from it, wiping them also from his neck and collar, before pulling the latter more closely over his ears, his fellow-wayfarer did actually make an upward movement, — but he was seated on a large stone imbedded in the floor of the hut, and to rise was not so easy.

Redwood, who had put his hands again in his pockets, was unaware of any change in their relative positions; and after a moment's hesitation Lord Carnoustie quietly abandoned the idea of making one. The time, he argued, for doing anything had passed. If he had meant to speak he should have done so at the first, directly the two dogs and their master appeared on the scene; when it would have been comparatively easy to claim a neighbourly interest in the new-comer, express a hope that he would have good sport, make suitable inquiries, and glide into general conversation thereafter.

But he had been stupid — he would own to his wife and daughters that he had been stupid — and let the opportunity slip.

He was not, however, to get off in the long run. Scarcely had he come to the above conclusion than a loud clap of thunder, startling in its suddenness, was echoed backwards and for-

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wards across the glen, and almost at the same moment another belated traveller darted past the cottage window, and unceremoniously pushing aside Redwood in the doorway, disclosed the terrified features of the wandering idiot Tosh.

'Ech, Carnoustie, it's wat!' The poor fellow shook himself like a dog, and greeted his friend with cordial familiarity. 'I'm thinkin' it's guy an' wat, Carnoustie.'

This was too bad.

'Humph!' said Lord Carnoustie, with a scowl.

Tosh, however, was not to be quelled. It was, he considered, all right for him now that he had found 'freens' to protect him from the thunder, which was invariably a source of terror — though he would laugh with pleasure at the pretty lightning — and he drew nearer, and recommenced confidentially, 'Whae's yon, Carnoustie? He's no ane o' oorsels. Whaur is he frae? I'm thinkin', Carnoustie ——'

'Oh, "Carnoustie! Carnoustie!" hold your blethering tongue!' muttered Lord Carnoustie, under his breath. 'He'll hear in another minute;' glancing towards Redwood, who, still unconscious, leaned patiently against the doorway; 'Tosh — look here, Tosh,' and he shook his head, and as Tosh would have phrased it, 'glowered' at the poor fool savagely.

Tosh dropped his jaw, and started back.

'What for are ye makin' sic faces, Carnoustie? My certie, ye're no that bonnie that ye need mak yersel' waur! What hae I dune?' sullenly. 'I'm no doin' naethin' to hairm onybody. Is it him ye're feared for?' pointing towards the door. 'Whae is he? That's what I'm speerin' o' ye. Ye ken it's yersel', Carnoustie, whae aye kens a' body in the place. Oo — oo!' with a jump and a howl. 'Gae wa' wi' ye, Carnoustie! Oo — oo — oo!' — holding in his hand the foot which poor Lord Carnoustie, driven to bay, had kicked in desperation, — 'Oo, ye hae hurt my sair tae!' blubbered Tosh, loudly. 'It was sair eneugh afore. Oo — oo — oo!' another dismal howl. 'Ye mun gie me a saxpence to mak it up to me; and ——'

'What are you two quarrelling about in there?' said a pleasant voice interposing. 'There's not much room for a shindy, you know.'

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'Quarrellin'? Whae's quarrellin'?' retorted Tosh, wheeling round upon the mediator, foot in hand. 'No me. I'm quarrellin' wi' naebody,' deeply offended. 'I ne'er quarrelled yet wi' man, wumman, or child. It's him,' pointing to the unfortunate Lord Carnoustie, who had now risen shamefacedly from his stone, and was in vain endeavouring to put an end to the scene. 'He's hurt me sair; an' noo he wunna gie me a saxpence ——'

Redwood unbuttoned his coat good-humouredly.

'Mak it a shillin',' wheedled Tosh, drawing nearer, and dropping his foot incontinently. 'I hae na had a shillin' sin' the New Year. Carnoustie wunna let me. An' he ne'er gies me aught but a saxpence himsel', and noo he wunna gie me that, 'cause he's angered wi' me ——'

'I have not got one to give, you absurd fellow.'

Lord Carnoustie saw the game was up. His tone, his air, his whole bearing underwent a transformation as extraordinary as it was unexpected, and Redwood's amazement and consternation at the disclosure thus made were swallowed up in self-disgust at his own stupidity.

This was Lord Carnoustie. And why should it not be Lord Carnoustie? There was nothing antagonistic to the idea in the appearance and demeanour of the urbane country gentleman, who, while courteously addressing him, was also casting indulgent explanatory side-glances at the still irate tramp — glances which Redwood had now no difficulty in deciphering.

'You are a stranger in these parts, sir, I imagine; and you have not come across my friend here before.'

'Humph! Your freen'?' interpolated Tosh, still in dudgeon. '"Mair kith than kind," *I* say. I hae na had yon saxpence frae ye ——'

'He is a very good fellow,' continued Lord Carnoustie, paying no heed. 'But pray don't give him a shilling.'

'Wad ye hinner me frae ma shillin', neist?' cried Tosh, angrily.

'It is too much. Tosh, you know I have told you you are not to take a shilling from anybody,' to the fool who stood by watching each face by turns. 'And, Tosh, I am ashamed of you, begging like this from stranger gentlemen,' continued

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Lord Carnoustie, severely. 'It is putting an affront upon us, your own friends.'

'Aweel, ye're no that freenly.'

'You know I never carry my purse about with me.'

'Aye, I ken that fine, Carnoustie,' — with a sneer.

'And yet you tried to put me to shame by demanding money before this gentleman! Fie, Tosh! That was not like you, Tosh. What would Mrs. Alison say if she heard that?'

Tosh was subdued in an instant.

'Ye'll no tell her, Carnoustie?' he began to whimper. 'Ye'll no fin faut wi' me to Mistress Alison? If ye do, she'll no let me in, nor gie me a piece, nor naethin'. Dinna be sae unfreendly, Carnoustie! Losh me! We a''hae our tantrums. Whiles it's yersel' whae has to mind yer manners.'

('As at the present time!' reflected Lord Carnoustie.)

However, he let the scene run on. Tosh was now doing him a service; for he was perfectly cognisant of the surprise which Redwood was endeavouring to conceal, and which required time to dissipate altogether. Addressing himself to the latter, he made a sign indicative of imbecility by touching his own forehead, and murmured in as low a voice as he dared, 'He is not quite responsible, as you perceive. What we in Scotland call "daft"; but perfectly harmless, and a great character. We all humour him. The poor creature ——'

But Tosh had by this time drawn nearer, suspiciously.

'Puir crater? Whatten puir crater?' demanded he, thrusting forward his face. 'Is it yersel' or the gentleman ye're talkin' o' Carnoustie? I ken nae ither "puir craters" on the place,' with a grunt.

'I think it may stand for both of us at the present moment, Tosh. The gentleman' — and Lord Carnoustie glanced an inquiry at his new acquaintance.

'My name is Redwood. I have taken Inverashet,' the young man replied to the glance, promptly.

'My new neighbour, then! I live round the corner there,' said Lord Carnoustie, turning over his thumb, as though he had a shed somewhere down the road. 'We are not much more than a couple of miles from Inverashet House. I— I hope to call.'

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'You are Lord Carnoustie, then! Many thanks. I shall be very glad if you will. It's — it's rather lonely there.'

The very thing he did not want to say! The very impression he did not intend to create! But, taken unawares by the meeting and all its odd concomitants, it is hardly to be wondered at that Redwood, never very remarkable for presence of mind, lost his head.

'You have brought no companions with you, Mr. Redwood?'

'None — but my dogs.'

'A nice couple they are. I have been admiring them both as I sat here. Not knowing who you were' — ('Well, I did not *know;* I could not possibly *know;* I only *guessed*,' Lord Carnoustie explained to his conscience, internally) — 'I wondered to whom such very nice dogs could belong. We have but few shooting gentlemen down yet. It is early in the season;' interrogation apparent in his tone.

'I thought, I fancied the weather might be better at this time,' replied Redwood, somewhat hastily. (He also had to insist on the assertion to his invisible mentor.) 'I have always heard so. August is a far wetter month in the west than June or July.'

'You will hardly believe that, after this afternoon's experience?'

'Troth, an' it's wat!' burst in Tosh.

Another thunderclap had been followed by a fresh downpour of heavy rain.

'Is na yon a blatter?' proceeded the fool, meditatively. 'I'm thinkin' it's gaun to be a coorse nicht. Carnoustie, ye micht say I was to sleep wi' ye,' he insinuated, persuasively; 'ye ken if ye was to say it, there's naebody wad gainsay it, an' I hae na had a bed at the castle for mony's the day.'

'Troth, Tosh, ye ill deserve it.' Lord Carnoustie could no longer resist the inclination to spar in the vernacular. 'See what I caught ye doin',' — taking Redwood into confidence with a glance — 'playin' the talepat to Mr. Redwood!'

'Redwood? Is that Redwood?' demanded Tosh, comprehending this for the first time. 'An' for what could ye no hae tell't me sae afore, Carnoustie? Was I no speerin' o' ye whae he was, when ye tramped on my tae?'

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'Ahem! Tosh, don't be forward. It is not for you to talk now. Do you understand what he says, Mr. Redwood? I suppose his broad dialect is almost unintelligible to you? Tosh is not a native of this island. He is an Ayrshire man, and they speak very broad Scotch there.'

'I might not manage the words by themselves,' replied Redwood, 'but I gather their meaning pretty well. And I gather that "Tosh" — is not that his name? — owes you a grudge for treading on his toe. But what "speering" may be ——'

'Is it him your speerin' anent "speerin'?"' Tosh was now bringing all the wits he had to bear upon the conversation. 'What I was speerin' was *whae ye were*,' — he was proceeding, but a peremptory signal from his patron silenced him.

'He was curious about you, that was the fact,' explained Lord Carnoustie, easily. 'Tosh does not often see a strange face. And what he calls "speerin' of me" means that he was putting inquisitive questions which I could not answer. He wanted to know who you were. Was not that it, Tosh?'

'Ye were as fain to ken yersel', Carnoustie.'

Both the others laughed. Lord Carnoustie was now in his element. Redwood seemed to apprehend Tosh, and few things pleased him better than to draw out Tosh for the benefit of an appreciative auditor. Moreover, as Tosh put it, Redwood need never guess that his own identity had been shrewdly divined. Accordingly the fool was again in favour.

'We don't often have summer visitors down so early in the season, I was saying, Tosh.'

'Na, we dinna,' replied Tosh, reflectively. 'No them that we can be neebourly wi'. We cannot be cheek-by-jowl wi' a' body. Carnoustie, ye mind we couldna thole the last Inverashet folks, you an' me. They were aye castin' it up to us aboot the post, an' the boats; an' they wadna gang to the kirk, neither.'

'Very true, Tosh; Tosh is a great church-goer' — to Redwood — 'wet or fine, winter or summer, I don't believe he ever misses a Sunday; do you, Tosh?'

'No that I mind o', Carnoustie. It's a fine place. Warm. And the minister's unco guid to me. Says he, "Tosh, I'm no

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gaun to preach to empty stammicks. Gang ben, an' get yersel' filled afore ye step ower to the kirk," he says.'

'Tosh is sharp enough always to look in at the manse on his way, you perceive,' observed Lord Carnoustie, regarding his humble friend with the benignity of a showman whose charge is performing well. 'Sermons are but dull things without you've a good bicker inside you, are they not, Tosh? The minister's in the right of it.'

'An' he gied me a saxpence ae time, when I couldna wun in. Ye'll gie me that saxpence yersel' when ye get hame, Carnoustie,' suddenly recalling it to memory. 'Ye ken ye did tramp on my tae, and guy sair it was; and I'm that wat an' cauld,' shivering pitifully, and thrusting his poor benumbed hands into his breast for warmth, as his teeth chattered.

'Poor Tosh!' said Lord Carnoustie, gently. 'I won't give you sixpence, for I told you I wouldn't; and, besides, you'd lose it in the condition you are now; but see here, my man,' patting the fool's shoulder tenderly, and uttering each word with impressive distinctness, 'you may go down to the castle — go to Mrs. Alison, and tell her from me — from me, mind — that she is to take you in, and give you your supper and a bed. It's no use your waiting here longer, for you are as wet as you can be already; so off with you, and get in to a good fire as quick as you can.'

Tosh grinned gratefully.

'And mind, say I sent you; and if there's anybody seeks to turn you away ——'

'I'll no be turned,' said Tosh, stoutly.

'No. Don't be turned. I'll stand by you to-day, Tosh. Only don't you complain of me again, Tosh.'

Tosh lifted his battered cap. 'Deed an' I'll no, Carnoustie. Ye're aye guid to puir Tosh when ye're no angered wi' him. You an' me's freens again; an' — an' — I'll say naething mair aboot the saxpence.' Then, saluting each in turn with a dignity at variance with his wild and uncouth appearance, he joyfully departed, leaving the less impervious occupants of the hut still imprisoned by the elements.

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CHAPTER XI.

PENELOPE BEAMED UPON HIM.

'In every creature she beholds a friend.' — CRABBE.

THE ladies were seated about the drawing-room in Carnoustie Castle.

They had been assembled there ever since luncheon, and it was now five o'clock; and one of the party, at least, had found it the longest and the dullest afternoon she had ever passed in her life.

'They are truly awful, taken *en masse* like this,' confided Penelope to herself. 'Separately, I can endure them. I am like the lion in Æsop's fable; when I can detach my bulls from each other I can fall upon them and slay them — that is, I can hold my own, and resist the pressure — but how can one poor little girl make headway against four gaunt full-grown women, who yet have only the minds of babes in arms?'

She had begun to realise the strength of the current with which she had to contend. On the surface it had been so smooth — like that of Niagara before its fall — that a more experienced eye than her own might have been pardoned for underestimating its force; but Penelope was quick of apprehension, and she was not long in discovering her mistake.

'They are perfectly satisfied with themselves, and their baldness and narrowness,' she discerned; 'they don't want to know anything, or to hear of anything off their own little beat, and any rash mortal who differs from what "dear mamma" thinks — let him or her be Anathema Maran-atha. I shall soon be Anathema Maran-atha. I am just about sick of "dear mamma." I can't stand much more of her, and her platitudes. The very nape of her neck reeks of self-conceit. She thinks she is the most perfect model of a British gentlewoman — and to hear her lay down the law! Mina is the only one of them I can

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hold any sort of free intercourse with; and I am not altogether sure of Mina. She is very bitter against the rest of them when she is alone with me — at least in certain moods — yet directly she is with them she is as soft and silky as a lapdog. It strikes me Miss Mina plays a part. She's weak; and she knows it. She is not fit to fight; and she hates them for having made her what she is. That's about the length of this situation. Rather snaky of "little Mina." Why can't she have it out, and defy the whole set? Tell them that she knows she is a pretty girl, and that she ought to be taken about, and allowed to see people and taught the ways of the world, and given her chances like others? I know what I should do in her place. I should simply bolt. I should turn round on them and say: "You've choked me and warped me and crumpled me up till I am as nearly as possible another Louisa or Joanna — till I daren't call my soul my own — and if I stay on here I shall only be fit for an asylum — so I'm off!" And I'd *be* off — there should be no bones about it. But this poor Mina, she hasn't the spirit of a harvest mouse; and upon my word, taking everything into consideration, I hardly wonder at it. It is all very well for me to talk: I have not been brought up in the choky atmosphere. I have not been forced to keep on babbling for ever, like the "brook." To hear that great old-faced Louisa shut up, and desired not to "discuss a subject unsuitable for young ladies!" And to see her meekly subsiding with the blush upon her maiden cheek! And she might almost be a grandmother! She was thirty-six last birthday; she told me so herself. I had thought she was only thirty-five. Joanna is two years younger. It is no wonder they look on "little Mina" as a prattler in comparison, though Mina is six years older than I. But what would Tiny Bolitho say? How she would scoff! Heigho!' — a long yawn — 'oh, dear — dear me,' covertly stretching every limb — 'if only Tiny Bolitho, or Tiny Anybody, were here!'

The afternoon, as we know, was very wet, and the earlier part of the day had been no less so. On such a day almost anyone would have been welcome anywhere: an interruption of any kind would have been hailed as a windfall; an accident — what would not Penelope have given for an accident?

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It may therefore be imagined with what feelings she espied at this precise juncture two figures ascending the wooded slope beneath the window wherein she sat; and detected in one of the two her late fellow-traveller, the interesting and uninterested Redwood.

With a cry of delight she sprang to her feet. 'Look here, all of you — here's a man — a gentleman — coming up to the house! Coming to call! I believe it's he — Mr. Redwood!' breathlessly.

'Penelope! My dear!'

But Penelope was in a mood to snap her fingers at reproof.

'My dear aunt, you can't pretend indifference. We have been sitting stuffing here for three mortal hours — we have not been outside the doors all day — and now, if uncle Carnoustie brings a visitor ——'

'Your uncle is bringing him? Oh — oh!' rejoined Lady Carnoustie, as if the question had been entirely altered. 'Why did you not say so before, my dear? Of course, if it is anyone your uncle is bringing to see us ——'

'I tell you, auntie, it is Mr. Redwood.'

'Why do you say "Mr. Redwood" so *familiarly*, Penelope?' Lady Carnoustie was frowning again.

'Why? Why should I not? What else can I call the man?'

'To talk of him like that — as if you knew him — to be so confident that it is he ——'

'It *is* he: I know him perfectly.'

'You have never even spoken to him!'

'There he is anyhow.' Penelope did not care to argue the point. 'Come and see for yourself, if you don't believe me ——'

'Penelope!'

It was Louisa and Joanna whose shocked voices simultaneously ejaculated the name.

'Oh, don't "Penelope" me, you two; I really can't stand being "Penelope'd" at to-day. I'm too miserable — or at least I was too miserable till I saw Mr. Redwood coming,' maliciously, for here was another galvanic discharge for them. 'So

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now, do let me be happy. Let us have some fun. The men are going round to the front door,' stretching her neck to see as far as she could. 'He has not on his nicest coat to-day,' eyeing Redwood, 'but that white mackintosh looks rather well too. I wonder where uncle Carnoustie picked him up!'

So did the others, but they held their peace.

'Uncle Carnoustie has not been to call, has he?' said Penelope, looking round. She was irrepressible; it was useless being stiff and cold with her.

Besides, it really was an event, Lord Carnoustie's bringing in a stranger to afternoon tea, — an event which had never happened before, save in the case of a belated artist who was sketching the castle and its precincts, and who had also been overtaken by an outburst of wind and rain.

That occasion rose now to the memory of all. The owner of the castle had chanced by good luck to pass by, as the hapless stranger was packing up his accoutrements; and having been applied to — Lord Carnoustie had been mistaken on that occasion also for a tramp — as to the nearest place of refuge in the locality, had been forced to name his own house.

Driven to it, Lord Carnoustie had done the thing well; he had not put off his interrogator with cottage or farmhouse, though both were as near as the castle; but had in his best manner proffered the shelter of his own roof, and had helped to carry the artist's easel up to the nearest entrance door.

The artist had proved a pleasant fellow. He had not been in the least disconcerted by discovering that he had in a manner thrust himself upon the chief personage of the place, but had in his secret soul blessed his luck which had sent the elderly nobleman his way; indeed, had the whole truth been out, he had, after the manner of his tribe, rather hoped that some of the members of the family might draw near, if he placed himself and his white umbrella in a sufficiently prominent position; and had he guessed quickly enough who the homely-looking old man was to whom he had shouted in his need, he would have made out a still better story than he did.

Even as it was, however, he reaped some benefit from an hour and a half spent within the walls of Carnoustie Castle.

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True, he only got some tea, and some cake, and some hot whisky-and-water before he departed into the wild and stormy night. Other people would have kept him to dinner; and he had fully expected to be so kept when first introduced to the family circle — but he did not know with whom he had to deal. Had he owned to the wife and children at home, he might have had a chance, — but he had taken in the three daughters of the house, three maiden ladies not quite so young as they had been, — and had cunningly, as he thought, suppressed all mention of home ties. He had told himself in his wisdom that a bachelor often makes his way where a married man does not. He would be a bachelor till his way was made.

Accordingly, he had waggled his brown beard appreciatively over Louisa's tea-tray, and nodded his artistic locks approvingly over Joanna's drawings, and tried to look as pleased with the latter as the former, — and both the poor spinsters had found him charming.

But dear mamma had not been so well pleased.

The painter had not understood about dear mamma, and had neglected her; perceiving only a somewhat sour-looking repellant dowager, whom he had no object in cajoling. Daughters of the house who had reached maturity were, he argued, much more likely to be influential, besides being more easily influenced. It would not have been much use waggling his beard affectionately at the cappy dowager.

He little knew! At the expense of a few happy phrases, a few trifling adroitnesses, he might have sat down presently at the loaded board bespread with rare old china and sparkling glass, to fare with which his own cottage meal could ill compete; he might have revelled in bristling rough-skinned trout, fresh from the mountain tarn; in hotch-potch succulent with early vegetables, crisp from the garden; in home-bred black-faced mutton, dear to the palate of gourmands; in such pastries, and jellies, and light frothy omelets and *casseroles*, accompanied by such bubbling cream as he had never had the luck to taste in his life before — and he had thrown it all away because of a trifling misapprehension!

At half-past six o'clock he had had to go. The dressing-

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gong had sounded, and compelled his starting from his chair and being ashamed of intruding so long; and although Lord Carnoustie had accompanied his guest downstairs, and desired the butler to administer a steaming tumbler as a preservative against the inclement October night, no further hospitality had been proffered.

In the drawing-room the following had taken place:

'Rather a presuming young man, to my view, my dears,' from the sofa.

'Do you think so, dear mamma?' with some animation from the tea-table.

'He seemed very *familiar*, at any rate, Louisa. I observed him talking to you in a manner that I could not but consider quite familiar.'

'Really, dear mamma?' Louisa felt mildly exhilarated. 'I thought him rather — rather nice ——' she murmured.

'And there was Joanna exhibiting her drawings! I must say I thought it going rather too far for Joanna to have out her portfolio of drawings for a perfect stranger.'

'But, dear mamma, papa told me,' from Joanna.

'Your papa does not sufficiently consider such points. He is too impetuous. He forgets you are young unmarried ladies.'

'I fancy dear papa thought that being an artist — I fancy he considered I might get a few hints. A few hints are so very valuable, dear mamma.' Joanna looked wistfully at the sheets she was laying by as she spoke. 'I feel I have learnt so much; he made so many useful remarks,' she added.

'Ah, well, my love, of course there is that to be said; of course I did not think of *that;* naturally you wished to take advantage of such an opportunity.' Lady Carnoustie's tone was more gracious. 'An *artist*, of course; I had forgotten. But then an artist, my dear girls, is also a *man;* we must not forget in our taste for art that what is — ahem! — fun to you may be death to him, you know,' jocosely.

Joanna had drawn up her neck, and smiled; but Louisa had been unresponsive. 'I really don't think, dear mamma, that you need be afraid because he looked at Joanna's drawings,' she had observed drily. 'He barely glanced at them. He seemed more

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disposed to talk of other things. He was hungry and thirsty, I think.'

'Indeed, Louisa, he was exceedingly kind to my poor attempts.' Joanna had reddened with vexation. 'Only you would keep asking him to have more tea when his hands were full, and he was busy giving me some most valuable hints. You quite worried him ——'

'No, indeed, Joanna; it was not me he was worried with.'

In the end Lady Carnoustie had had to pacify them both, and had vowed to herself that one might pay too dear for an afternoon's diversion. She had been as amused and excited as anyone throughout the first half-hour, but subsequently as her interest waned, her suspicions arose. These last had now, she considered, been justified. Obviously the artful stranger had ingratiated himself with both her dear girls — Mina had been out of the way — and they were now almost vulgar in their jealousy and red faces over him.

Altogether it was objectionable, and Lord Carnoustie had been warned against too free admission of fascinating itinerants in the future.

But this had happened so many years ago, and so many summers and winters had passed without anyone ever coming to the castle who was not well known there, that even another adventure of the kind might have been condoned; and as for what her husband was doing now, it was positively praiseworthy.

When Penelope, looking cheerfully round, demanded if Lord Carnoustie had been to call at Inverashet, his wife jumped at the idea.

'You have probably hit the mark, my dear; your uncle has been to call at Inverashet — although he said nothing beforehand about it — and has invited our new neighbour to return with him. I am glad Carnoustie has been so civil,' to herself. 'He must have been forced into it. However, he will tell us how it happened.' She had to rise to receive Mr. Redwood.

And when she *had* to do anything Lady Carnoustie did it very well. Like her husband, she would evade and procrastinate, and be tacitly ungracious — indeed, both were adepts in

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the art of holding good-will at arm's length — but brought to book, their blue blood asserted itself.

'I know you will be glad to see Mr. Redwood, our new neighbour at Inverashet,' said Lord Carnoustie, courteously preceding his companion up the room. 'Mr. Redwood — Lady Carnoustie. Mr. Redwood, my dear, was sheltering from the storm in the old poacher's brokendown hut up the glen, where by good fortune I had strayed in likewise. We had to wait for nearly an hour. Did you hear the thunder? There were one or two pretty loud claps.'

'We fancied there was a little thunder.' Lady Carnoustie smiled sweetly, and extended her thin hand, laden with old-fashioned rings. 'I hope you did not get wet before you found shelter, Mr. Redwood? The roads up these glens are rather bare of trees.'

'My daughters — and my niece,' said Lord Carnoustie, now calling Redwood's attention to the other ladies.

'Now he will know who *I* am,' quoth Penelope to herself.

'None of you have been out of doors to-day, I dare say,' proceeded the speaker in a polite tone of inquiry. 'It is not easy to keep dry, since you can't cover up from head to foot as we can,' — (he disdained anything in the shape of an overcoat, at least for summer wear); 'but you look pretty snug in here,' surveying the comfortable apartment. 'A fire is not an ugly sight on a day like this, Mr. Redwood.'

Redwood assented to everything. He was, as has been said, a bashful man, and by circumstances he was rendered especially so at the present time and in the present company. Not only did he instantly recognise in Lord Carnoustie's so-called niece the fellow-traveller whose presence had annoyed him on his journey down, but all his former suspicions returned as he fancied a certain significance in the gaze with which she was regarding him, and he doubted not also that knowing his story herself, she had passed it on by this time to the rest.

Until now he had forgotten Penelope.

He had taken so little interest in her, apart from the desire he felt to get away from her, that it had not occurred to him to wonder whither she was bound, or even to conjecture whether

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or not she would land upon the island at all. That she should have been set ashore in the next bay to his own, and within three miles of Inverashet, was a piece of ill-fortune he had not anticipated.

Penelope, however, shrewd and friendly, beamed upon him.

'Little minx!' he cried to himself, 'how impudent of her to grin at me like that! I call it the worst kind of form to show a fellow he's spotted — and to show it so openly too.'

'Won't you come a little nearer the tea-table?' He almost started at the clear fearless tones in which the invitation was couched. Penelope had always been accustomed to order people about, and be encouraging and communicative within her own home; and the *gauche* reserve of the sisters, who were drawn up behind the table in a formidable phalanx, none of them contributing a syllable to make the moment more easy, seemed to demand her aid. If they could not speak, she could.

And she spoke prettily, — even Lady Carnoustie pronounced afterwards that Penelope spoke prettily, — in simple unaffected language, yet courteous withal.

Lord Carnoustie, for his part, looked the gratitude he felt. 'Those girls of mine are no good at a pinch,' he muttered internally. 'They leave it all to their mother and me. Standing gaping there like a pack of frightened ewes! Are you a tea-drinker, Redwood?' aloud. 'Or will you have something stronger, to keep off a chill? No? I seldom take anything myself; but I'll have a cup to-day, if you please, Louisa. What have you got beneath that cover, Joanna? Hot cakes? Hot cakes, Redwood? Nasty things, *I* call them. Spoil your dinner. By the way, will you stop and dine with us?' in obedience to his wife's face. 'We are only a family party, but I am sure it will give Lady Carnoustie and me much pleasure ——'

'Certainly. I hope you will, Mr. Redwood. I hope you have nothing to prevent you?' Lady Carnoustie knew what Highland hospitality demanded when, as it seemed to her, the demand could not be ignored.

So far Mr. Redwood had not transgressed; nay, he had done quite the right thing in stepping back to the hearthrug and her

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own vicinity immediately he had received his tea — (he wished to be out of Penelope's range) — and moreover he was a settled neighbour, the tenant of the shooting which marched with their own — not a vagrant professional man with a seductive brown beard; — it was the least she, a Carnoustie, could do to invite him to remain for the evening.

Redwood was torn two ways.

He loathed and shrank from the supposition that he was once more being pitied and found interesting because of his recent misfortune; he quailed before the eyes which fancy asserted were watching to see how he bore it; but at the same time the charms of solitude in a barren shooting-lodge, devoid of every sort of luxurious equipment, were beginning to pall.

'You are very kind,' he murmured.

'Some brown bread-and-butter, auntie?' proffered Penelope, dancing up to the fire corner.

'Dash that girl!' muttered Redwood, turning on his heel. He thought she had come up to have a look at him.

In self-defence he walked away to the place whence the offender had come; the chair she had vacated was that next Mina Carnoustie; and neither the vainest, nor the shyest, nor the most self-tortured man alive could have construed Mina's absent gaze into anything but what it was — the outward expression of thoughts far away from the visible scene.

'She at least is not thinking of me.' Redwood, with a sigh of relief, seated himself in the empty chair.

CHAPTER XII.

FEAR.

'Yet why, oh heart of tinder, be afraid?
Comes so much danger from so fair a maid?' — CRABBE.

'I SAID he was a good-looking man,' muttered Penelope to herself, half an hour afterwards, 'but I was a fool to say anything

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of the kind. Good-looking! He has not a feature in his head. He has a kind of glamour of good looks; a false pretence that imposes on you at first sight. You are sort of juggled into thinking something of him by the way he carries his head, but it is all make-believe. He has a disagreeable *down* look; he never looks one of us straight in the face.' That is a bad sign. I am sure I had no loss in him on board the steamer,' indignantly, 'nor any now, for that matter. Mina is very welcome to him for me;' and the young lady, who had found herself stranded on the hearthrug with her bread-and-butter plate, for Redwood had negatived the offer of any in a manner that was almost rude, watched him with jealous detracting eyes subsequently.

Nobody ought to misunderstand this. Penelope simply wanted her share of the good things going, and could not understand why she did not have it. We know her opinion of her cousins; that anyone should not share the derision in which she held them argued that person on a level with themselves.

She had expected to be distinguished on the instant. Without having more than the usual vanity of young ladyhood, she saw, as she could not help seeing, how different she was from one and all now present; how beside her radiant youth even the fair-skinned Mina lost something of her freshness, while the other sisters faded into insipid spinsters, with high cheek-bones and sharply pointed chins.

It was not, however, on the score of appearance alone — or even chiefly — that the impatient girl expected swift and discriminating notice. She wanted Redwood to be immediately struck by her *savoir faire* as contrasted with the silly backwardness of Lord Carnoustie's daughters. 'It is their place to be the hostesses; this is their house; and he is their father's guest; — but if they won't, I will.' Energy and hospitality had prompted immediate action, and though the Carnousties themselves had been only too willing to second her efforts, and even Lady Carnoustie had rather approved than otherwise, seeing how Penelope saved the situation, she felt the disapproval of Redwood's eyes.

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'He thinks it's cheek, my inviting him to eat and drink. As if I did not know my business better than he! Thank you, Mr. Redwood. I do know how to behave. Yes. Thank you. So kind' (mocking); 'but, as it happens, I have seen a good deal of society, and am not at all in need of your instructions. What on earth can you have to say to Mina?' suddenly exploding in wrath. 'She won't know what you mean if you talk London shop, and I dare say you don't care for anything else. *I* could have talked to you, stupid; *Mina* can't.'

Mina, indeed, showed very palpably that she could not. Beneath the strain of having to conduct conversation in the presence of the family, and the audience of Louisa and Joanna, both of whom remained at the tea-table with an air of chaperoning their young sister, Mina's cheeks were pink, and her expression unhappy. She would not have minded had no one been listening and watching. She had prattled fearlessly and contentedly to Etheridge in those ever-remembered days which in the retrospect seemed flooded with sunshine, but she had scarcely a word to say now.

For every syllable she would presently have to give an account. It would all go before the adjudicating committee which sat upon her, and Penelope, and many other people — that committee whereof Louisa and Joanna were the sub-judges, they themselves being yet not wholly exempt from supervision.

What a clack there would be as soon as Redwood went! What worrying to threads of every trifling observation! What conjectures as to the probable meaning of every simple comment!

If only Redwood would talk to the others! If only one or both would address him! Why did they not? There was just as much reason for their talking as for hers. But they sat with their hands folded, mute, and Penelope remained in the background.

In the large, stately apartment Penelope might have been miles away. There was no chance of a rescue from anyone, and colder and colder and shyer and shyer grew the hapless object of Redwood's chief attention.

Louisa and Joanna, however, thought their sister was doing

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very nicely. 'Dear Mina looked so pretty and modest,' they told their mother presently. 'She could hardly bring herself to open her lips; it was so sweet to behold her the very picture of distress — just what a young girl ought to be when accosted by a gentleman. Do you remember "Evelina," dear mamma? What a terrible state of confusion "Evelina" is thrown into when the charming Lord Orville addresses her! I remember how you pointed out to us the delicacy of her sentiments. Our sweet Mina reminded me this afternoon of that delightful heroine.'

'Indeed, I rejoice to hear it, Louisa. Mina ought to be gratified by your approval. And you thought — do I understand you to infer that you thought this Mr. Redwood — ahem!' — coughing suggestively — 'that he was — that he seemed attracted by our little girl! Of course we must be very careful — *most* careful — we must be on our guard — and if it should — ahem! — be shown that your surmise is correct, your father must be informed ——'

'What did you yourself think, mamma?'

'I observed Mr. Redwood seated himself by Mina; and — and addressed her, Joanna.'

'He took no notice of Penelope, mamma.'

A gleam of pleasure shot from Lady Carnoustie's grey eyes.

'You are correct, Joanna; he took none whatever. Penelope is not a person to be easily passed over, either. One might almost have expected that strangers would be taken with her pretty manner and speech. She does not altogether please me; she is often disrespectful — as soon as she is excited she is disrespectful immediately — but I must own I have no fault to find with her behaviour in company. And the way she remained with me by the fireside, instead of attaching herself to all of you at the tea-table and usurping your place, was a piece of delicacy I should hardly have expected. I was pleased with Penelope; she helped at the right moment, when we were all a little shy and uncomfortable; and she knew when to subside, directly everyone was at ease.'

Penelope was not so well pleased with herself.

She wondered what it was which, in particular, had drawn

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upon her the dislike of Redwood. What had been her especial crime? Had she seemed to him too forward, too pushing, too civil and anxious to be civil?

But, if so, surely others would have looked black as well as he. She would have heard of it — or felt it in the air — when left alone with the family; whereas, no sooner had Lord Carnoustie carried off Redwood to the library, in order to pen a despatch for his dress-clothes, which it was arranged should be fetched by a groom, than Lady Carnoustie had actually patted her hand, and observed in her kindest tones that Penelope's cheeks missed the open air.

'You have had a whole long day within doors, my love,' she had lamented. 'It has been rather trying, has it not? Could not you and Mina have a little run about the house before dinner?'

And the two had been dismissed graciously, in order, as they both felt, to clear the room for the tribunal to sit.

Outside the door, they had agreed to dispense with the 'running about.' Instead, they would go and sit in Ailsie's room, and tell her about their visitor, and about his having accepted to stay to dinner.

Ailsie had been already partially informed on the subject. She had heard who was in the drawing-room, and been requested by an excited messenger from the kitchen to give out some extra condiments with a view to elaborating the usual bill of fare for dinner. Dinner at the castle was always substantially good, but it was capable of being elongated and adorned.

Ailsie was in a benignant humour. 'Aweel, he mun hae been keen to come, an' he couldna wait for a better day than this,' she observed cheerily. 'We didna expeck comp'ny the day. But it's guid for Macartney to be ta'en by surprise. We suld aye be ready. An' what thocht ye o' him?' looking anxiously from one to the other.

'Oh, he seems very nice,' said Mina.

'I am not particularly struck with him,' said Penelope.

The old woman gave each in turn a shrewd look.

'What's he like?' she demanded.

'Tall, with dark hair and eyes, and a soft voice,' said Mina.

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'Tall, with a scowling pair of eyes, and a disgusting back,' said Penelope.

('Humph! He's no gi'en *you* ower muckle o' his eyes!' concluded the nurse, with an inkling of the truth; and, like her mistress, she experienced a glow of pleasure.) 'An' whae was he wi'? Was he wi' papaw — or mammaw — or — or whae?'

'How do you mean, Ailsie?' replied Mina. 'How could he be "with" anyone in particular? We were all in the drawing-room. He could not be with one more than another.'

'Oh, could he not, though?' cried Penelope, laughing in spite of herself. 'I rather think he could — and he was. You must keep an eye on this "bairn" of yours, Ailsie,' merrily, for she began now to be amused. 'Look here, and I will tell you what took place this afternoon. I began to do the civil by Mr. Redwood. I handed him his tea; inquired after his wetness; followed him about with the bread-plate — and got snubbed for my pains? Yes, I did. I, Penelope East, did all the work, and got more kicks than half-pence for it. "Thus not for yourselves," what's the old Latin thing I learned from one of the boys — the East boys — *Sic vos non vobis*, &c., &c. It's no good quoting Latin to you, Ailsie; but the interpretation thereof is that while Mr. Redwood was reaping the benefit of my goodness and kindness, he walked away from me wherever I was, and walked straight up to ——' a nod and a finger supplied the rest.

Ailsie smiled apprehension; Mina looked round with a mystified air, either real or assumed.

'What can you mean?' she murmured, as though seeking in vain to fathom her cousin's jocularity. 'What are you talking about?'

'Why, you,' laughed Penelope, running up to her and shaking her by the shoulders. 'You — you — *you!* Wake up! Don't look at me like that. I am talking of you — you and Mr. Redwood. Eh, Ailsie? Is not that it? Miss Mina and Mr. Redwood, eh?'

'It's no for me to say,' quoth Ailsie demurely, though her stern features shone with subdued delight. 'Hoots, Miss Penelope, gae wa' wi' ye, talkin' sic daftness! We're no that put

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to't for men that we mun jump at the first whae comes. There's plenty wad be glad to look oor way, and ye said yersel' ye thocht naethin' o' him ——'

'I was only jealous when I said that. Jealous because he paid me no attention, and reserved it all for this creature,' giving her cousin a little friendly push. 'I wanted a part of the gentleman myself, don't you see, Ailsie, you old dear? You can feel for me, Ailsie, can't you?'

'Nay noo, Miss Penelope, ye're jist — I kenna what. That's a' your fun. Besides, we want nae Redwoods here,' with a sudden thought. 'Oor rank is *barons*,' drawing herself up. 'We munna stoop ower low, ye ken. We mun marry wi' oor ain fowks.'

'Bless me! Mr. Redwood may have a dozen barons at his back for aught we know to the contrary. Who's to say he is not heir to a barony himself? — Not to say a dukedom?'

'Hoot-toot!' But Ailsie's eyes again gleamed. 'Hoot-toot! Miss Penelope, ye're funnin' — ye ken ye are ——'

'Indeed I am not; here's Mina, ask her. Mina, will you kindly inform us — Ailsie and me — what are Mr. Redwood's prospects? Who is he? What is he? Where does he come from? In the course of your lengthy conversation with him, you have no doubt been put in possession of all particulars of his life.'

'I don't think he talked about himself at all,' said Mina, quietly.

'You don't think? Can't you tell? You must know if he did, or not?'

'I hardly know what he did or did not speak about,' said Mina, putting her hand to her forehead. 'It was so very disagreeable. I felt so nervous. What did he fasten upon me for? I am sure I did not want him. And there were all the others; he might have had anyone of them ——'

'Me, for instance,' interpolated Penelope.

'If they would either have gone away, or have joined in,' pursued Mina, warming up beneath the privilege of venting her grievance. 'I do think it is very unkind of people to sit staring at you when you are doing your best: it takes away all your ideas; I felt so stupid, and hot, and uncomfortable, altogether.

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I was so nervous I could hardly speak: and I did talk such nonsense! It was too bad. I am sure he must have thought me dreadfully silly and disagreeable.'

'If he did, he took a peculiar mode of showing it,' observed Penelope, drily. 'I should not have said Mr. Redwood found any fault either with you or your conversation judging from appearances. He looked quite benevolent when he turned his face in your direction. It was a very different face from that reserved for me,—but then, indeed, I rarely had the benefit of a front view at all. It was nearly always the back with which I was favoured. Well, I am going off to dress, and you shall see me shine forth to-night. I shall try what a smart frock can do to retrieve my position, and Marie shall frizz my hair to the skies. Heigho! what a comfort dress is on a day like this! And to have some one to dress for is luck indeed!'

She left the room.

The old woman watched the door shut. Then she dropped her head on one side, and listened till the footsteps without had ceased to be heard; but directly the last echoes had died away, she sidled round to the hearthrug on which her nursling stood.

'Meenie — Meenie, dearie,' she whispered, 'is there onythin' in't, think ye? Ye can tell me, ye ken: tell your auld Ailsie, whae wadna let on to mortal being. But gin there *was* ——,' the old hand began nervously to twitch and fumble, 'gin it *micht* be, oo, weel ye ken, my bairn, it micht be the savin' o' ye;' she stopped in obvious emotion.

But Mina shook off the trembling hand with a laugh.

'How foolishly you talk!'

'Like eneugh! I'm but an auld fule; but that's nae matter. Meenie, ye ken what's i' my mind. Dinna lauch like that—dinna,' in low, imploring tones. 'I may put aff yon English lassie wi' my havers anent grand marriages and the like,—it's no for her to ken the oots and the ins,—but for yersel' I wad say, tak' heed, my bairn, tak' heed,—ye're upo' the brink o' a precipice,—oh, dinna flout the hand that may haud ye frae it. If he's dacent, mind na his bluid nor his money,—if he seeks ye, tak' him;—tak' onybody'—her voice sank almost to a groan—'tak'—*onybody*.'

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CHAPTER XIII.

'SETTING OUT FOR THE KIRK.'

'WHO's for church?' said Lord Carnoustie on Sunday morning, it being the day after the events narrated in the last chapter. 'It may keep clear till after church, but we are pretty sure of a drooking coming home. So don't any of you come who are afraid of rain.'

Lady Carnoustie and her two elder daughters were afraid. They did not like the look of the sky, and agreed that it would be too great a risk to venture forth upon an open road, which skirted the shore for over two miles without sheltering trees or hanging cliffs. Carriages and horses were never taken out at Carnoustie Castle on Sundays. Even Lady Carnoustie herself walked to and from the parish church when she could, and stayed at home when she could not.

'Well, are any of you going?' demanded her husband, having received her negative. 'Mina? Penelope?'

'I shall go,' replied Penelope, getting in her voice first, as she had a trick of doing, after the manner of 'only' children. 'You come too, Mina. We shall see Mr. Redwood, sha'n't we?' aside.

'Yes, papa, I am coming,' said Mina. Then followed *her* aside, 'You had better not say those things here, Penelope.'

'It would shock them, wouldn't it?' rejoined Penelope lightly. The two had departed to make ready. 'They would say, "What a terrible motive for going to church!" Well, but it's not my "motive"; it's only an adjunct thrown in. If there had been no Mr. Redwood in existence I should have gone all the same. I always go.'

'For its own sake, Penelope?'

'For its own sake? What do you mean?'

'I mean for the sake of what you hear there.'

'Hear there? No. No, it's not for what I "hear." What a curious notion! That's Scotch, I know. That's because of

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the long Scotch sermons. In England the sermons are nowhere, except when some particular man preaches. But I know quite well why I ought to go,' added she, flushing slightly. 'I never thought about it, I am afraid, till I was confirmed, three years ago. The vicar must have thought I was a perfect little heathen, for no one had ever taught me, do you see? But he was very good and patient, and — and I began to understand things better afterwards.'

'You have nicer churches in England than we have here,' said Mina in rather a peculiar tone. 'I went once to an Episcopal chapel in Ayrshire. We were stopping at a country house there, and some of the people in the house were going and asked me — at least, one did — and I went. It was, oh, how beautiful!'

'Was it?' said Penelope, indifferently. She had no ear to catch the underlying strain beneath the words. To her comprehension it was but a common-place incident which her cousin had recalled. She did not know — how should she? — with whom Mina had gone to the little chapel and with whose presence its memory was associated.

'I don't care much for our church at Inverashet,' pursued Mina, recalled to the present, 'but I go, of course.'

'And will Mr. Redwood go, "of course"?' Penelope had taken to teasing about Redwood. Redwood had been as indifferent to her elegant and fanciful evening robe and prettily arranged hair as he had been to her common serge and tumbled locks. He had also anew been attentive to her youngest cousin throughout the previous evening. Penelope had been half indignant, half amused.

As she now put on the various items of her wardrobe her nimble imagination was as busy as Marie's fingers, and was occupied by conjectures in which Mina played a prominent part. Had Mina shown herself conscious of conquest, elated and responsive, Penelope would not have liked it; but Mina showed nothing of the kind. On the contrary, a slight but perceptible annoyance was manifested when the two girls were by themselves; while in the presence of others Mina's countenance wore an expression of mingled timidity and anxiety, which, while it

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obviously gave satisfaction to her own family, was inscrutable to her cousin. 'They will end by making her as daft as themselves,' concluded she, having caught up the word and added it to her vocabulary. 'I don't for a moment suppose the man is in earnest. He can't be. No one could possibly wish to marry into this daft family' — pausing to consider — 'but I suppose he thinks that Lord Carnoustie being a near neighbour and a big man, who could bother him in many ways unless he were squared, it would be highly advisable — indeed, only prudent — to be *épris* with one of the daughters for the time being; just sufficiently *épris* to make things pleasant and get his shooting in peace. Then he can ease off at the end of the summer and no harm done. Of course, if it came to choosing which daughter, there was simply no choice. *Aut Mina, aut Diabolus.* Sometimes I think there is a vague hint of the Diabolus about the Mina. She *is* a queer girl. She always seems as if she had something on her mind. Really and truly, I hope she is quite all there. Of one thing I am pretty certain already, and that is that she is sly. She has all but confessed to me that she tells lies. Poor thing! I don't wonder. I should not tell lies myself; but then I have not had the spirit crushed out of me by those awful females.' We regret to say Penelope alluded to the great and wise Lady Carnoustie and her devoted daughters. 'And if any harm ever comes to this poor silly-faced Mina, I shall know whom to blame,' concluded she.

Nevertheless she was nettled that Redwood had gone for the loaves and fishes, as she phrased it. He had done the prudent thing; attached himself instantly where such attachment would yield a profit; and perceived in her pretty, piquant self only a waif and stray, too insignificant to divert him for a moment from his purpose. 'It is too bad. I am not just Lord Carnoustie's indigent niece, as he seems to think,' her pride revolting from the idea. 'That is the worst of being found in a house with nobody to explain who you are. Naturally, people who come to it think you are only some sort of hanger-on. If that stupid old thing——' (again we must apologise for the impertinent reference to Lady Carnoustie) — 'if that frigid automaton had had the sense to make a few allusions to me, and say where I

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had come from, and hope I should enjoy my stay — something to show I was of *some* sort of consequence — he might have wakened up. As it is, I shall have to do my own work. I must unfold myself. Let me see, something in this style might be effective: "Is this part of the Highlands" — (I'll call it "the Highlands," though ten to one uncle Carnoustie puts in his oar; it makes him mad to hear me say "the Highlands" of this noble island, though why is beyond me) — "is this part of the Highlands as new to you as to me, Mr. Redwood?" I'll inquire if I get as far. That will make a good start. As a matter of fact, I know from Mina that it is as new, every bit. So then he owns up that it is. So then I respond. I tell him what part is *not* new to me. I get on to London. I show him I am a London girl' — a different accentuation from that used by Lady Carnoustie when applying the same term — 'and he won't be able to resist talking to me London talk. Oh, you don't take me in, Mr. Wooden-faced, mealy-mouthed Redwood. You can talk, and you can listen; and you know a little bit more of the world than peeps out at Carnoustie Castle. Just you wait a bit, and I'll pull the right string. It must have been to please Mina that he kept so mum last night, and looked black at me when I made my one little attempt. He thought he ought to suit his conversation to his company. Oh, I saw through you, Mr. Redwood! You did it very well — abominably well. You had them all purring over you like a bevy of old cats, but you did not take little Penelope in. She is pretty smart, I tell you, and you will have to keep your weather-eye open if you are going to do business without consulting her. Now for it — that is to say, if my gentleman is at church,' with a sudden qualm on the subject. The next moment a light flashed all over her face. 'I know nothing about this man and his habits, but I have an intuition that, if the Inverashet seat at Inverashet Church is occupied this Sunday morning, it will be because the Carnoustie seat is also expected to be adorned by the fair presence of Mina Carnoustie.'

From which it will be noted that Penelope had seen too much and heard too much at her early age. Things had been talked about in her presence which it was not supposed she

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would understand, but which she had thought out for herself afterwards. She had read widely and not always wisely. She had acquired the art of putting two and two together — not always with correctness — with the result that while it was indisputable she knew some things whereof she had better have been ignorant, she was not yet quite as worldly-wise as she fancied. Good sense and good feeling came to the rescue, where the lack of good taste might have brought the poor little girl into trouble. And in the present instance good sense whispered that she would gain nothing by hinting at a disagreeable interpretation of their new neighbour's amiability; and good feeling still more forcibly argued that to expose the defenceless Mina to more observation than she had already attracted would be positive inhumanity.

Accordingly Lady Carnoustie was delighted with Penelope. Penelope never mentioned Redwood's name herself, and looked so harmless and innocent when it was named by others that it was obvious (to them) that she either had perceived nothing or was resolved to perceive nothing.

'I think it must be the latter,' pronounced Lady Carnoustie, looking round for a few minutes from her study of *Keith on Prophecy*. 'Penelope is too intelligent to have been blind. She has, however, the delicacy to wish to appear so. It is greatly to her credit. How different is such reticence from the coarse effrontery of Lady Ainslie!' Lady Ainslie had never been forgiven; no one of them had ever set foot in Ainslie House since the day whereof we all wot.

'And I think, mamma,' suggested Louisa with what she felt to be acute discernment, 'I think Penelope has gone this morning in order that Mina may not be alone.'

'Indeed! I did not think of that, Louisa; but I doubt not you are right. Now that you have brought it under my notice, I did observe that something passed between the two dear girls about the time your father brought forward his proposition. Well, it was kindly thought of on Penelope's part, I must say, and if Mr. Redwood should be in church ——'

'Oh, he will be!' from Joanna.

'May I inquire how you come to be so sure, Joanna?'

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'I heard him say so to papa. I did indeed.' In her earnestness Joanna's bound volume of Goulburn fell off her lap on to the floor. She had been presented with a nice copy of Goulburn when the other theological work was prohibited as dangerous in its laxity, Lady Carnoustie having sent to her own bookseller on purpose, and very kindly hoped that her dear Joanna would understand she did not wish entirely to debar her from doctrinal study. Joanna now dived after the volume, and, having recovered it, proceeded. 'I heard Mr. Redwood say — no, first papa said, "What church will you attend, Mr. Redwood? that is, if you go to church at all."'

'Your father said that? He ought hardly to have said that. He should have taken it for granted' — with emphatic finger accompaniment — 'that everyone goes to church. I should not have expressed a doubt.'

'You know, dear mamma, the last tenants did not go,' timidly ventured Louisa.

'That was what I was coming to,' cried her sister, and Goulburn again tumbled to the floor.

'Really you will have that book ruined!' sharply interpolated Lady Carnoustie.

Then as Joanna, somewhat crestfallen, once more recovered her treasure and examined its edges, 'Put it upon the table till you have finished what you have to say. We shall never get to the point. What did Mr. Redwood reply? Pray let us have the plain answer without any further circumlocution.'

'Certainly, dear mamma. It was only that Louie said ——'

'What Louie said has nothing to do with it. What we wish to know is what Mr. Redwood said.'

'He said — papa said ——'

'Oh dear, dear me!' Lady Carnoustie threw up her eyes. 'How often am I to speak? Is it *possible* for you, Joanna, *for once* to cease beating about the bush and keep to the simple fact we desire to hear? What — did — Mr. Redwood — say?'

'Unless I repeat what papa said first you cannot understand the reply.' The unfortunate Joanna was at length baited and browbeaten into something like sullenness. 'Mr. Redwood replied to papa that he thought after what Tosh had said about

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the last tenants of Inverashet it would never do for him not to go to church.'

'What Tosh had said? How very extraordinary! What could he have meant? Are you positive you heard correctly? *Tosh!* Most extraordinary! Most peculiar! Did he not repeat what it was that Tosh had said? Did your father seem to know to what Mr. Redwood referred?'

'Oh yes, very well! Papa laughed and said that he, Mr. Redwood, would stand no chance in Tosh's estimation for certain if he did not go.'

'It must have been some — joke,' said Lady Carnoustie with solemn enlightenment. 'I can think of nothing else. Tosh must have made some of his imbecile remarks — your father must have led him on to do so — and it was to one of them that Mr. Redwood referred.'

Nobody had anything to say against the presumption, and Joanna, having contributed so noble an item to the morning's amusement, was suffered to resume her studies and occasional prattle without more than her usual share of admonition and correction throughout the remainder of the morning.

Redwood was in church. The trio who tramped up the stone staircase leading to Lord Carnoustie's own 'loft' were aware of a presence in the Inverashet pew, which faced theirs, even before they took their places. Little country churches, whose occupants are dotted about at intervals, and whose entire congregation does not number over a hundred souls, are scoured at a glance. Even Penelope, who did not know where to look, was aware in the flash of an eyelid that the stranger was there. He was there, and he was looking at them. She was glad she had not wasted her new and pretty hat.

It was all very fine for this cold-blooded individual to pass her over without giving her a chance. Had there been anyone else in the place she would not have given him one; she would not have bestowed upon him a second thought. But she looked around in vain for anyone approaching to the appearance of a gentleman elsewhere, and decided that she could not yield Mina the whole of Mr. Charles Redwood.

Redwood's serious face and stony composure, the slow turn

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of his head and the rigidity of his immovable back, were somehow provocative, stimulative — in an irritating way, attractive. She could make nothing of him, and could not rest satisfied to make nothing. If he would but take a little, ever so little, notice of her! Or, failing this, if she had but an opportunity of showing him that someone else took notice. On the whole, she would almost have preferred by this time to have a new personage appear upon the scene, with whom she could be quite engrossed, and whose devotion must make her of some sort of consequence in Redwood's eyes.

But of this desirable apparition there did not seem a ghost of a chance.

In the regions below the only people who stood out in any way from the rest of the congregation were Lord Carnoustie's red-faced factor and his stout sisters — Mr. Soutter in a respectable Sunday suit; the women looking somewhat blown-about, warm, and out of breath, as though the effort of walking beneath waterproof cloaks against a soft west wind had been too much for them.

Penelope passed over the whole party without a second glance, though afterwards she grew rather particularly fond of the Misses Soutter, and always went into the drawing-room if she heard they were there.

At present she had something else to think of. Was there nobody, actually nobody, even at church — the rallying point in every lonely neighbourhood — worth looking at, with the one tiresome exception?

'And what is he? He is not a quarter as good-looking as some of those men down there!' she mentally cried with contempt. 'Those farm men and shepherds are a fine set. What a face that one has in the corner! He is splendid. What a beautifully shaped head and neck, what a magnificent colour, and what a line of features! A pure Greek outline. Good gracious! To think of such looks being wasted on a common man! If Mr. Redwood had been like that farmer, or shepherd, or fisherman, or whatever he is, there might have been some excuse for his giving himself such airs. As it is — oh, dear me, what a comfort it would have been if that beautiful creature had been a gentleman! He is no sort of good to me as it is.'

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CHAPTER XIV.

LORD CARNOUSTIE'S SHOW MAN.

REDWOOD joined the party at the conclusion of the service, as, for a few minutes, did Mr. Soutter the factor, and his sisters. The rest of the congregation defiled past with varied salutations, to all of which Lord Carnoustie warmly responded.

This was a great time with him. He liked to get out of church, and down his own stairs, before anyone else had escaped; and then to hurry round to the main entrance, and stand close by, interchanging greetings and weather comments, until he had interviewed the entire assemblage.

Occasionally, one or another would step out from the ranks, and address his lordship; taking the opportunity to put an inquiry, or ask for a direction, confident that a few moments for this purpose would always be graciously accorded, but careful not to trespass too long — for everyone was cognisant of the old lord's foible.

It pleased them: it made him one with them. They liked to see that he did not shuffle away up the road without a word to anyone, as it was remembered the former Lord Carnoustie, a still shyer, still prouder, infinitely less accessible landlord had been wont to do. The present Carnoustie was proud enough and shy enough with his equals in all conscience, — but with themselves he was gentle and easy to be entreated; and the friendly feeling which was universally entertained for him on this account was never more manifest than on Sunday mornings.

Presently out came the Greek-faced shepherd. Something about his stalwart figure and swinging stride seemed familiar to Penelope, and as soon as he had saluted the party — which he did with a grace becoming his appearance — and passed on, she eagerly demanded, 'Is that one of your people, uncle Carnoustie? Is that the shepherd we saw on the moor, Mina? I thought it must be. I was looking at him in church, and thinking, What would some of our great artists give for such a model? For

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Orpheus, we'll say? Or Artaxerxes? Or — any of those? I am slightly mixed, I know,' laughing, 'but anyhow I wish I could tell Millais — or Long — where there is a "find" like this to be had.'

'Ay, you mean Torquil Macalister,' responded Lord Carnoustie, tranquilly. 'That's what they all say — everyone who comes here. He's a magnificent fellow; reminds me always of a stag of ten, when I see him on the heights. Did you notice that shepherd of mine, Redwood?'

Redwood was standing by, looking on.

'Torquil Macalister,' replied he. 'I came across him the day after I landed on the island. He is an uncommonly fine-looking fellow; six feet three or four, I should say? Have you many like him here?'

'Not here, nor anywhere, I should imagine.' Lord Carnoustie gave a little laugh. He was almost as proud of his shepherd as of his fool, and considered that Torquil and Tosh alike adorned the place. 'I showed him to some visitors we had here in the spring, and they said he ought to be taken to London to make his fortune. I showed him to an artist once ——'

'How absurd of papa to speak like that of "showing" people!' interjected a voice into Penelope's ear, and her cousin Mina, with a look of vexation, made an effort to break up the group.

But Lord Carnoustie could both talk and walk. He moved on, and continued his conversation. 'Torquil Macalister is not altogether an ordinary shepherd lad, you must know. I fancy he must have been told about his looks by some of the strangers who come in the summer, for I doubt his having the sense to find it out for himself; and as for the people about here, they think Lachlan — the other shepherd — a deal prettier fellow!' chuckling. 'Isn't it so, Mina? Didn't Ailsie say so? Oh, it was Louisa or Joanna she told about it then!' — as Mina made a gesture of dissent — 'Ailsie affirmed that the lassies of the neighbourhood thought Torquil was just *very well* — nothing particular — but that Lachy was the favourite. Did you see Lachy? He sat two from Torquil in church?'

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'I saw him,' said Penelope, who had the faculty of seeing and hearing everything and everybody. 'A black, bushy man, with a shock head of hair, and a beard.'

'That was he — that was Lachlan — or Lachy — as they call him. Well, what do you say? Is he fit to hold a candle to Torquil? You're a girl of sense, Penelope, and you've seen others to judge by ——'

'My dear uncle, I have never seen any man in that rank of life' — Penelope hesitated and then proceeded boldly, flashing a glance at the imperturbable Redwood as she did so — 'nor in any other, to "hold a candle" to Torquil. I do wish someone had him for a picture. He is so wasted ——'

'What nonsense you talk!' murmured Mina's voice in her ear again, a low angry murmur. Penelope could not understand it.

'Well, as I was saying,' continued Lord Carnoustie, recollecting what had started him on the above tack, 'Torquil has had his head a wee thing turned, as we say in Scotland. They have been talking to him — some of those artist people — about his appearance and his manners — he has very good manners, you may have noticed — and, though I have no fault to find with him in his work, Mr. Soutter tells me that he is a good deal set up in some of his ideas. He reads, you know,' looking around for astonishment. 'Reads; and, what's more, reads poetry! Scott, if you'll believe me! Mina here will tell you that not very long ago she had to lend him a volume of Scott — what was it, Mina: "The Lord of the Isles," or "Rokeby," or some of them? — and he had it about with him all over the moors. I found him one day far up among the knolls, lying on the heather with his dogs beside him, so deep in his book that he never heard me till I was close at hand. Almost looking over his shoulder! Of course, I took no notice. But he told Mina all about it, I fancy. Eh, Mina?'

'What, papa?' Had Mina been listening, or had she not?

'Why, about Torquil. Didn't you hear me telling them about Torquil?' testily. 'It was you yourself who told me. You said you lent him Scott's poems, and that he read them by moonlight on the heights when out after the young lambs;

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and now you come out with your "What, papa?" as if you had never heard of it — as if I were making it up! Isn't it perfectly true that Torquil Macalister is something of a genius — that's to say, that he wants to be a gentleman?'

'The two are not precisely ——' but Mina corrected herself with an effort. 'It is quite true about Torquil's reading poetry, papa.'

'Well, that's all I wanted of you; you need not look so cross. Of course I wink at it, you know,' to Redwood. 'It would never do for me to be taking notice of such nonsense; but I am rather proud of the fellow, I own. Look at him now,' the tall form of the shepherd came into sight at the moment rounding a point of land far ahead; 'see what a distance he has got to already!' cried Lord Carnoustie, exultingly. 'See how he clears the ground! He wants to get away from us all, for he never stops to "crack" with anybody; that's another way he has; he likes to be with the gentry, and he won't consort with the common people. They rather laugh at him for it. But you take an opportunity of having a talk with him, Redwood, and you will find he really is a superior fellow.' Then, in a lower tone, intended only for Redwood's ear, 'They tell me he insists on wearing as many clean shirts a week as I do!'

The four were now walking abreast along the road, the ladies on one side, the gentlemen on the other.

'Uncle Carnoustie has a sort of patriarchal pride in his possessions — I mean his human possessions,' observed Penelope gaily to her cousin. 'I like to hear him discourse about them, and brag of them. Has he many more treasures such as Tosh and Torquil?'

'How absurdly you talk! But I can't wonder at you, when papa leads you on. Papa ought not — he has no idea how cruel he is — how unjust. Torquil Macalister is only a poor Highland shepherd,' with emphasis; 'he might be let alone, not dragged out into the light to make sport for us all. It is shameful to hold him up to ridicule and contempt ——'

'Ridicule and contempt? Good gracious! what are you thinking of? What is all this about? You don't half listen

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to what is going on, you funny Mina. Why, uncle Carnoustie was vaunting Torquil — his looks, his abilities, his poetic yearnings,' laughing; then lower, 'even his wearing of innumerable clean shirts! I heard him,' laughing again. 'I heard uncle's aside. Torquil Macalister is evidently his show man.'

'Yes. His — show man,' bitterly. 'You are quite right; he is papa's show man. Is that not treating him with cruel contempt?'

'Rather not. Torquil would not think so; I'll answer for him. He would be as proud as Punch. The man wants to be noticed and admired. He is as vain as a peacock. Heavens! my dear Mina, you do look at things in such a quaint light sometimes! You hear your father pointing out to us strangers the beauties of Torquil, the magnificent Torquil ——'

'Penelope, I can't bear to hear you!' Suddenly Mina shook herself free of her cousin, and, deliberately crossing the road behind her father's back, addressed Mr. Redwood.

'*Well!*' exclaimed Penelope, left to herself.

For a few moments she was too much astonished to make a single observation; it must, indeed, have been some strong emotion which had thus impelled the shy, shrinking Mina Carnoustie to escape by means so foreign to her nature from her society; and what could have induced that emotion? What had been said to cause anyone annoyance?

Mina was not easily disturbed; hitherto she had allowed Penelope to tease, quiz, torment her with phlegmatic indifference — nay, with some appreciation of her cousin's merry-hearted buffets — so much so that Penelope had considered she was really doing a good work in thus providing her own amusement; but now, if Mina were going to turn rusty, cogitated Mina's tormentor dolefully, what fun would there be left in Carnoustie Castle?

She had thought she could knock a spark out of this one member of the household. Alas! it now seemed as if she would have to take heed of her words, even with her. The outlook was black — very black.

And she was having a nice taste of what the future might be in the present moment.

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Mina and Mr. Redwood were in the high tide of talk; he, at least, was talking with considerable animation, and, as she had of herself gone round to his side, even if she did not contribute much in the way of response, it was justifiable to conclude the animation was not thrown away.

Redwood's road was the same as theirs for about a mile, when it broke off at right angles, and turned up the glen which had been pointed out to the new tenant of Inverashet on board the steamboat.

Redwood was now himself pointing out landmarks and inquiring about boundaries, on which subject his companion was sufficiently well informed, and might have been supposed to be interested; but Penelope from her distant quarters, doomed as she was to trot alongside of her elderly relation and be content with his babble of this thing and that, took note that presently her cousin relapsed into her usual listless demeanour and replied in monosyllables.

'How can he throw himself away upon that *stick?*' mentally fumed she.

CHAPTER XV.

AN EXPLANATION UNDER AN UMBRELLA.

'I DO hate waste!' mused Penelope, further. 'And it is such waste! To think that there should be only one man in the place, and that he should be so dense! *I* don't want him; he need not suppose that. But I feel sorry that a nice-looking, a fairly nice-looking man, with a pleasant voice and a tolerable smile, should have such a mercenary soul. If he were honest—but I am sure he is not honest. He means nothing. Well, then, if he is not in *earnest*, he might just as well *amuse* himself with *me*. It is no good his hammering away at Mina; she is simply worried by it (though she made use of him just now,' in parenthesis), 'and it would have cheered Mina's poor cousin in this lonely spot. Then, behold the irony of Fate! He has taken

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quite a dislike to poor Penelope, the only person in Carnoustie Castle, or, for that matter, in this whole desert island, who could have appreciated him!' Aloud, 'Yes, indeed, uncle Carnoustie, I have been admiring it all the way along.' Lord Carnoustie was pointing out a celebrated view, and she had been gazing on it with sightless, troubled eyes. She really was vexed to be so despised by Redwood.

Then all at once a change of scene took place.

The rough tweed skirt worn by Mina Carnoustie to brave the weather had rubbed loose the bootlace of one of her boots, and as it flapped hither and thither — now over her instep, now under her sole, getting trodden into the wet soil at every step — it caught her father's eye. He had, as we know, his own feelings about bootlaces, and could not endure to see them untied and disorderly.

'What's that beneath your foot?' he demanded, sharply. 'Stand still, and let me see. I knew it; your bootlace! That's like you girls; you never can manage to tie up your boots properly with your niminy-piminy fingers. Here, stop a minute!' holding her back. 'Let them go on,' indicating Penelope and Redwood, 'and put your foot up on the wall here,' they were crossing a bridge with a low stone wall on either side. 'Put it up and let me tie it decently for you,' concluded Lord Carnoustie, laying down his stick, all intent upon the operation.

Here was Penelope's opportunity at last.

'I suppose this neighbourhood is as new to you as it is to me, Mr. Redwood?' began she, suavely, though her heart beat a little as she spoke. When such an opening has been watched and waited for, and a dozen forms of speech in which it is to be taken advantage of carefully prepared, the silly heart will sometimes beat at nothing.

'It is quite new,' said Redwood, drily. All his animation seemed to have departed. He had nothing to say to Miss Penelope East.

'I came down from London last Tuesday,' observed she, however; she was determined to keep the conversation going. 'I came here in one day, travelling by the North-Western.' Then she affected to trip over a stone in order to afford him an

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opportunity for exclaiming 'Why, so did I! I, too, arrived on Tuesday, and travelled by the North-Western,' but he declined to rise to the bait.

'I am too old a bird to be caught thus,' reflected he.

'It was a pity I had to leave before the season was half over, but my father was obliged to go abroad — to the West Indies — on business; so I could not very well remain alone in town, and came straight off to Lord and Lady Carnoustie's.'

'Indeed?' very coldly.

'It is beautiful here; at least, it was so until yesterday. I thought Carnoustie Castle a most heavenly place that first evening, and it *is* very beautiful, don't you think? But it is not what one can call a wildly amusing house to stop at,' smiling confidentially. 'After London, you know.'

'After London it is a paradise,' said Redwood, abruptly. He would now plant a blow. 'I detest London and everything connected with it. It is to me an odious place, and I thought that here at least I should be where no one was likely to force upon me London topics, and repeat the insufferable tittle-tattle of London tea-tables.'

It was a rude speech, rudely made. Penelope, who had never been so spoken to in her life, coloured with vexation, and the tears rose to her eyes.

'I am very sorry,' she faltered, and bit her lip; it was childish to be so disconcerted, but she could not help it, could not utter another word for emotion.

Redwood, who had pursued his own theory until he had allowed it to overmaster his judgment and his manners, was now, in his turn, confounded. He had expected a light rejoinder, or an expostulation, and was quite equal to disposing of either, and being still more explicit and disagreeable, had occasion offered.

But there was something so naïve and unexpected about the reception of his brusque announcement that all at once he perceived its brutality. Was it possible he had been mistaken? He had no absolute certainty that he was known to this girl, and no positive grounds for taking offence; he had only his own suspicions and deductions to guide him; and what if they had guided him wrong?

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Sudden shame smote him as he caught the little trembling apology, and perceived that there might quite possibly have been nothing for which apology was due. What a fool he had made of himself!

And if she did know his story, how extra foolish it was to evince such soreness of spirit at the very mention of the word 'London.' He most particularly desired not to show that he was smarting beneath the treatment he had received from Mary Duberly, and now he could not stand a pin-prick. He would have given much to take back the petulant outbreak which had so exposed him.

But he could think of nothing to say. He could not say, 'You see, you spiteful monkey, that I am not going to stand any of your tricks. Hands off. Whenever you think to "draw" me I shall make no bones about shutting you up. So I warn you what you have to expect, and it will be to your advantage to take the warning.'

Neither could he well explain, 'Miss East, I may as well confess the truth. An ugly experience befell me before I left London which makes every recollection of the place abhorrent; wherefore I should be obliged if you would kindly forbear to make allusions. It is foolish of me, I know, but I cannot feel at ease under them as yet.'

Nothing of this could well be put into words, and yet he felt ashamed and discomfited, and would have liked to say that he also was 'very sorry' if he could.

As it was, they plodded on for some yards in silence.

Then Penelope slackened her pace, hearing the footsteps of Lord Carnoustie and Mina behind, and both together replied to the cheery remarks of the former, and tacitly inserted between them the person of the latter. As usual, Mina was passive in the hands of anyone who imperceptibly directed her movements.

Presently, however, Penelope did not know how it was, the two girls found themselves behind the others. It may have been her own doing. She was now uncomfortable in Redwood's presence, and all desire to do away with his unfavourable impression of her had vanished. It was impossible to suppose that such an impression had been only in her fancy:

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his tone, his look, the air of aversion with which he had drawn away from her while he spoke, and the rough and explicit 'set down' which she had received in reply to an ordinary civil question, conveyed its own meaning too distinctly; and she could only feel that a man who could conceive such a causeless dislike, and so causelessly vent it, could not be worth the vexation already experienced, and certainly should never cost her a fraction in future.

How changeable is woman! In another five minutes another shock to Penelope's tender system — she was at a tender age, easily startled — had changed the aspect of everything afresh.

The party had reached the spot where their roads separated: Mr. Redwood's winding up the glen to Inverashet, that of the rest skirting the sea as far as the entrance gates of Carnoustie Castle.

As the two gentlemen halted in front to let the girls come up, Lord Carnoustie was saying in the accents of cordial hospitality which everyone could count upon once he were caught and held fast (with him it was really only the effort of making it which caused the proffer to be less frequent than it might have been — 'Papaw's lazy, but he's no ill-natured,' Ailsie was wont to affirm): 'Mr. Redwood, you will find this a dull neighbourhood — if we can do anything for you — but anyhow I hope you will let us see as much of you as you can at our place. Lady Carnoustie is always at home at five o'clock.'

'Good-bye,' said Mina, offering her hand.

Penelope slipped round behind the other two. 'Good-bye,' she said, bending forward and keeping her hands to herself.

'Ha! the rain!' exclaimed Lord Carnoustie suddenly. 'Girls, where are your umbrellas? Up with them! I said we should have rain before we got back.'

Alas! Penelope's umbrella had been left in church.

'What?' began her uncle, whom such a trifle was most sure to upset. 'Left your umbrella in church? I never heard of such folly! How did you do it? How did you not find it out before? We were half an hour at the church door; how came you not to think about it then? And that bit of a thing of Mina's——'

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Redwood was already round by Penelope's side. 'Here is mine, Miss East,' he said courteously. 'You must take mine — or let me hold it over you,' suiting the action to the word.

'No — pray no. Mina will share hers with me — I know she will.' Penelope seized her cousin's arm and pressed it with imploring and significant fervour.

'I am afraid it will hardly shelter us both,' replied Mina obtusely. And, indeed, the umbrella was terribly small; in fact, it was hardly an umbrella at all, but an old *en-tout-cas* which she had filched from the stand in the hall, her umbrella having gone astray, and been broken into the bargain. Its representative might have covered herself, but all present saw the hopelessness of its sheltering Penelope also.

And Penelope had on her prettiest hat — her hat with the pale mignonette-coloured feathers! Yet feathers and all must be sacrificed rather than accept Redwood's offer, still less his companionship.

'I am really not afraid of the rain,' she cried desperately. ('I am very much afraid of you' was written in her eyes.)

Redwood could not help smiling. ('Small wonder,' he said to himself.)

'I have nothing to go home for; no one is waiting for me; let me come along, and hold this over you, Miss East. Lord Carnoustie, will you not persuade your niece? She will get wet through ——'

'Ay; I told them they would get a drooking — silly things! Well, since you have let yourself in for it, Penelope, you had better do as he says. But what you were about to leave your umbrella behind — we must remember to tell someone to go for it.'

'There, Miss East; now, may I?' It was Redwood who spoke; Redwood who in dangerously soft tones, and with a beseeching eye cast down towards her, was pressing his services! Penelope could scarcely credit her senses.

What could this mean?

All the way home he was on the watch, and it seemed to him that no two people were ever more troublesome to deal with than the two whose companionship a few minutes before he

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would have infinitely preferred to that of the one whose ear he now coveted. He really did admire Mina Carnoustie, and he had not been able until within the last five minutes to endure Penelope East; yet now he was impatient to speak to Penelope, and for the moment regardless of Mina!

He had learned something which changed everything — that was all. He had casually inquired of Lord Carnoustie — putting the question as easily as possible — if Miss East were a member of a certain East family to whom in his mind he had attached her when conjecturing over her supposed knowledge of himself and his affairs.

Lord Carnoustie had replied, 'No.' His young relation had nothing to do with the family in question.

'I fancy I have met her before, however,' Redwood had murmured suggestively.

Then Lord Carnoustie had spoken out:

'Ay, Mr. Redwood, you have met her before' — (Redwood's pulses leapt) — 'and I will tell you where.' ('Now for it!' thought Redwood. 'At the Duberlys', or the Charltons', or at the Lyric, or on some of those confounded Hurlingham days!') 'I will tell you where,' proceeded Lord Carnoustie with a chuckle. 'On board the boat. She got in at Ardrossan as you did; and with a girl's curiosity took you in, and told us all about you,' and he laughed pleasantly.

'Was it only there?' said Redwood, in a tone that puzzled his companion. 'Are you sure, Lord Carnoustie, that your niece — did she not remember me elsewhere? I had an idea ——'

'I am perfectly sure that she *said* so, Mr. Redwood.' Lord Carnoustie was beginning to draw himself up, and wonder if there were anything behind this, but Redwood hastily dispelled the supposition.

'Oh, if she said so, it was so, of course. It was the merest fancy on my part. I thought perhaps I ought to have known Miss East again,' indifferently, 'and that I might have been remiss in not recognising her — that was all.'

'Why, then, you may set your mind at rest, if that was it. Penelope had never seen you, nor heard of you; she said so to us all. You were a perfect stranger to her on board the steamer,

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and until I suggested that the stranger she described would be the new tenant of Inverashet, she did not even know your name.'

It was upon hearing these words that Redwood was seized with the compunction which resulted as we know. He could not have avoided, indeed, offering his umbrella; but he certainly would have walked home in the wet rather than share it with the girl whose looks taunted him, but for Lord Carnoustie's communications.

He was now burning to apologise; and at length by gradual degrees succeeded in detaching himself and his charge from the other two; by speaking low, and dropping the umbrella slightly in front, he might safely assume they were out of earshot.

'Miss East, I was very rude just now.'

'Oh, it — it doesn't matter.'

'I must explain, before I can ask your forgiveness. The truth is, I was labouring under an entire misapprehension; I supposed — I imagined that you were — that I had known you — or you, me — I mean that we had met in London — I knew you came from London — and I have — have' — stammering — 'very painful associations with London at present. I cannot explain; but lots of people know about it; and I stupidly imagined you were one, and that you were laughing at me.'

'Mr. Redwood! I? Laughing at you?'

'If you wish me to explain it further, I will,' he said gloomily. 'I feel I owe it to you for my rudeness.'

'Oh no — no!'

'Only a few minutes ago I learned that I was an absolute stranger to you till we met at Carnoustie Castle.'

'Not quite that,' said Penelope truthfully.

'Not? Your uncle said so.'

'We did meet on board the steamer, you know. I was the girl who got in when you did, and held your sticks while you got over the side.'

'Ah, yes; you were very kind' — he could not forbear smiling at her simplicity. 'But we were strangers then, all the same. You did not know my name, nor I yours.' This was very artful, he thought.

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'No, I did not know your name.' She shook her head.

He breathed a fresh sigh of relief.

'And when you did know it, you had no association — it had no meaning for you — no connection?'

'None at all. But why did you fix on me?' demanded Penelope suddenly. 'Oh, I suppose because I came from ——' then she remembered she was not to name the 'odious place.'

'I see you know why,' he smiled again, but quite cheerfully. 'You will forgive me now, won't you? And — and — you won't repeat this? I have endured enough — I can't tell you what it has been.'

('I don't want to know what it has been — I want to know what it *was*!' muttered Penelope.)

But she was now in high glee. She had unriddled her problem. She was dying with curiosity; she was, in short, excited, elated, joyous. She and Redwood talked contentedly together the rest of the way, and when she got home she sat down and laughed till she cried over the ruin of the pretty mignonette-tinted feathers, which both had forgotten altogether in their eagerness, and which either his carelessness or the dampness of the atmosphere had permitted to uncurl till they now hung limp and draggle-tailed over the brim of the hat.

Penelope shook the hat, and laughed to see the rain-drops fly off it.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN IMPORTANT INVALID.

'TOSH was not at church!' suddenly exclaimed Lord Carnoustie, laying down the carving-knife with which he had been hacking away at the cold beef — he was not a good carver. 'What can have become of Tosh? He never misses church.'

'Tosh is very bad with a cold, my lord,' intimated the butler from behind.

'Very bad? Is he, indeed, poor fellow? I thought he looked

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rather *gash* yesterday afternoon. Where is he? Who is looking after him? What have they done for him?'

'Mrs. Alison has him in bed in the stable loft, my lord.'

'Ay, in the stable loft. He'll be snug enough there. But what has she done for him?'

'I did not hear any more, my lord.'

'Not hear any more!' Lord Carnoustie looked round indignantly. 'Do you mean to tell me that no one has been near the poor fellow?—that he has been left to be ill, and have nothing done for him? Have none of you been up to see?'

'I have no doubt Mrs. Alison has done all that is necessary.' The cold tones of Lady Carnoustie's voice were intended to dispose of the subject, but her ladyship had never learned to know when these would be unavailing. Her husband simply declined to hear.

'Go and see at once what Mrs. Alison says about him,' he desired imperiously. 'Go yourself, Hyslop. I would not have poor Tosh neglected for the world. I sent him to Mrs. Alison yesterday to be looked after, and this is how she does it! Packs him off to a cold loft!'

The butler left the room.

'I really think, my dear, you might have been content to believe that no one in this house would be neglected, without sending off Hyslop in the very middle of dinner'—the mid-day Sunday repast was proceeding. 'Really you might think our comfort was at least as important as that of a poor half-witted beggar-man,' protested Lady Carnoustie with a frown of annoyance. 'How can I have things as I wish them to be when you disarrange everything?'

'Duncan can hand the plates, if that is what you wish. Here, Duncan,' to the footman, a raw recruit, who stood trembling where he had been placed, helpless in the absence of his superior, 'hand the vegetables to her ladyship, and then bring them to me. That's right. Don't hold the rim like that, my man,' in an encouraging aside. 'Take hold like this,' suiting the action to the word. 'You'll soon get into the way.'

'Too bad to disturb the order of everything on the very first

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day Duncan has waited!' murmured Lady Carnoustie at the other end, for the benefit of her own adherents. 'Really your father is too inconsiderate. How is Duncan ever to learn ——?'

'That's right. You'll soon manage it,' in the distance.

'It is not *his* place to be teaching the footman,' continued the lady, for she would fain have had Carnoustie know his 'place' as well as his domestics. 'He will have annoyed Hyslop, and put out Ailsie, and all for Tosh!'

'Well, and why not for Tosh?' Lord Carnoustie caught the last words. 'Tosh is as good a man as another in his Maker's sight, I presume.'

'Oh, Carnoustie! Pray — really — taking your Maker's name in vain!'

'Nay, madam, *I* am not taking it in vain.' A gleam shot from the old baron's eye, and he lifted his head with dignity. 'I fancy, were our Maker sitting at this board to-day, it is not *me* He would rebuke. He who healed the blind beggars by the wayside would not sneer at my care for poor Tosh.'

'Well, well, my dear — of course, of course!' But Lady Carnoustie was undeniably disconcerted. 'But there is a moderation in all things, Carnoustie. Tosh shall be taken care of, of course. And if Mrs. Alison will let me know ——'

Hyslop re-entered. 'Mrs. Alison has been herself to the stable-loft, my lord.'

'Oh!' — a grunt of satisfaction.

'She took a plaster with her and a second counterpane. She also sent up a bowl of broth at eleven o'clock.'

'Ay, that's right. A bowl of broth at eleven. He would be glad of that, I dare say. What has he had since? It's two o'clock now. He must be hungry again. Tosh has a great appetite.'

'Mrs. Alison thought he would do till the servants' dinner, my lord.'

'When is the servants' dinner?'

Hyslop coughed discreetly. 'We dine presently, my lord — as soon as we have finished here. It will be in about half-an-hour, my lord.'

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'Tosh will never be able to hold out till then. Get him ready a plate from here. Here, Duncan, bring me a plate.'

'A kitchen plate,' interpolated Duncan's mistress.

'Hoots! — kitchen plate! Well, kitchen plate, if you like. Only bring it sharp, and see that it is hot. He will like the hot beefsteak-pie better than the cold sirloin. And, Hyslop, give him a good helping of peas and potatoes, and a good hunk of bread, and see that you pour plenty of gravy over the potatoes.'

Lady Carnoustie durst not say a word.

'And let me see it before it goes,' concluded Tosh's careful benefactor, with a shrewd perception of the value of his final look.

Jellies and fried plum-pudding were also sent up to the invalid. Cold custard was poured over the plum-pudding; and from his own plate Lord Carnoustie swiftly transferred a piece of pastry he did not like, when Hyslop's attention was turned the other way. When complete, there was an assortment of delicacies which no one but the healthy vagrant who could eat anything and at all hours could possibly have digested.

But Tosh's friends were not afraid.

'That will set him up finely,' quoth Mistress Alison with not ill-pleased irony. 'Tosh will want to be ill here again, I'm thinkin'. Losh me! if thonder's no papaw himsel' gangin' across the yaird!' — peering from her bedroom window — 'wi' a wheen strawberries! — the first strawberries! Gairdener's been savin' them for the day! There was but a sma' dish full! He maun hae gane wi'oot himsel'. Eh, Carnoustie's a guid man!' drawing in her head again. 'Blessed are the mairciful, for they shall obtain maircy!' and with a warm glow at her heart the good old woman arranged her majestic Sunday cap, and prepared to betake herself to the servants' hall.

'Would uncle Carnoustie have been as much concerned if Torquil had been Tosh?' demanded Penelope with mischievous intent. 'Eh, Mina? I don't think he would — quite. Tosh first — Torquil second. Why don't you laugh? You never laugh now at my little jokes. Laugh, I say!'

'I see nothing to laugh at.' Mina was as cold as a stone. The two girls were alone, having escaped to their own quarters,

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a deserted schoolroom in a sunny turret, to which Penelope had been introduced on her first arrival at the castle, as the spot she would be expected to frequent. She had now inveigled her particular companion thither by a process familiar to masterful spirits, namely, by marching straight forward herself, and propelling the weaker vessel at her side by the insertion of her hand through the other's arm. Mina, who never opposed anybody, submitted like a lamb.

Mina, however, had but little meekness in her face or accents, when merrily nudged and desired to laugh now. Here was Penelope once more recurring to her detestable jest! Would nothing stop her — nothing make her forget?

'Why, how strangely you look!' cried Penelope, letting her cousin go, and staring with both eyes. 'Are you angry, or what? Your lips are quite white! For goodness' sake, Mina, don't go into a fit,' drawing back hastily with a new thought. 'I don't know how to manage people in fits. Do you feel ill?' anxiously. 'Shall I call anyone?'

'You foolish girl! What are you talking about?' With a strong effort Mina affected to turn lightly aside the insinuation. 'You are quite as likely to have a fit as I am,' she added.

'Hum! Don't smile that ghastly smile, then.' Only half satisfied, Penelope still held off at arm's length. 'I — I don't like it. If you feel queer, I wish you would say so. There's nothing to smile about. If you are in a temper — but what on earth is there to be in a temper about? I only made the very mildest observation on your father's partialities.'

'I had rather you did not make them.'

'Well, I must say you *are* thin-skinned.' It was now Penelope's turn to feel aggrieved. 'You need not pretend I meant to run down uncle Carnoustie — I meant nothing of the kind. I think he is as nice as he can be. I thought he was quite delightful at dinner with all his fidgets and his fuss over poor daft Tosh; and upon my word, if you are to take fire because I merely remark that he prefers his fool to his Apollo ——'

'Can you not leave Torquil Macalister out of the question?'

'Eh?' said Penelope, dumfoundered.

'I repeat that the way you talk of a man unknown to you,

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and valued by us, is — is — offensive. I beg you again to leave him out of the conversation.'

'You really are the most extraordinary — and what words you use! "Offensive" — whoever heard of one girl calling another girl "offensive"? And taking up the cudgels on behalf of a shepherd! I shall begin to think you have "a bee in your bonnet," as I heard Ailsie say someone had, yesterday. ('I believe she has,' internally, 'so I really had better be careful!') Come, now, I won't be "offensive" any more,' patronisingly. 'Kiss and be friends. And now for a more interesting topic — Mr. Redwood. What do you think of Mr. Redwood?'

Mina did not seem to know what she thought of Mr. Redwood. Oh, yes, she liked Mr. Redwood — she thought him good-looking, pleasant, gentlemanlike; reserved, but not too reserved; friendly, but not by any means forward.

'You are simply echoing what I say,' cried Penelope, out of all patience, at last. 'You are willing to praise everything about Mr. Redwood, because you don't care a button for him ——'

And why should Mina care a button for him? Mina wanted to know in mild surprise. Penelope was perfectly in the right. They had both met Mr. Redwood for the first time the previous afternoon — he came to them as a perfect stranger ——

'Oh, drat "a perfect stranger"! Now, what are you jumping at? "Drat's" one of my words. Perfect strangers are a vast deal more entertaining than threadbare acquaintances. I don't want to know every item about a man — to say nothing of his father and grandfather, armorial bearings, family honours, and hereditary vices. I like him a thousand times better stripped of externals — one tastes the true flavour; one penetrates, when one gets a defenceless wretch at one's mercy, and can pierce him through and through. I feel to know this Mr. Redwood — at least I could know him — I shall know him now' — ('now that we have made up our difference,' internally) 'ever so much better for his not having a great cumbersome family gambolling round him, enumerating his virtues, and extolling his talents. As if one cannot be trusted to find out for oneself the good and the bad. So you really don't feel you care to respond to the gentleman — eh, Mina? He is not your sort? I am bound to

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confess you had the first offer of him. Indeed, I fancy he gently inclines your way still; he did the civil by me and his umbrella — or rather he made his umbrella do the civil by me; but that was — (Ahem! I don't think I need enter upon the tale. It's too long. And she might repeat it. It would hardly be fair, considering the poor man was really unnerved, and made such a very ample and energetic apology. No, I won't tell anybody: I will keep it to myself) — Mina, don't you see the sun is out?' changing the subject with a dart. 'See, there is blue sky over yonder. Don't let us waste time talking over a perfect stranger,' laughing, 'let us be off to the shore; it will be glorious along the shore.'

'Have you not had enough walking for to-day?'

'Have I? Well, I did think I had when we sat down to dinner. I am not such a very great walker; I had an idea of taking a good lie down in my room this afternoon in that great pillowy sofa; it looked the very place for a snooze.'

Mina seconded the idea warmly. She was sure her cousin would be the better for a rest — a good rest — of lying down till tea-time — when she would herself come and call her before going downstairs. She would escort Penelope to her chamber now — (gently edging towards the door) — and tuck her in comfortably. She appeared quite serene and affectionate — even cheerful. Obviously, all Penelope's former iniquities were either condoned or forgotten; and her cousin was now only anxious to minister to every need, and to close upon her recumbent figure the bedroom door.

In a word, Mina overdid her part. 'She is anxious to be rid of me,' concluded poor Penelope, tucked up upon her sofa; and it seemed a little hard that it should be so. She would have liked to gossip, to chatter, to giggle, conjecture, confide, and prognosticate. She knew what she wanted — a regular girl's talk — not to be solicitously escorted to her bedroom, and left there all alone in the big place, with a shawl over her feet, and a Sunday book on the table near.

Mina had wanted to pull down the blind; Penelope had rebelled against a drawn-down blind. Then Mina had asked if there were anything more she could do; and Penelope had

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almost rejoined, 'Yes, you can do this, stay here with me,' but did not. She saw that her cousin was impatient to be gone.

Afterwards she remembered that impatience, and understood it.

She remembered also that about this time old Ailsie the nurse was always inquiring of her whenever they came across each other as to Mina's whereabouts — that she would be particular in demanding if the two had been together — that she would seem curiously inquisitive about the direction their wanderings had taken, and be more satisfied if they had been to the village, or round the bay, or to call on the Misses Soutter, the factor's kind old sisters, than to the lonelier hillsides and glens.

Sometimes she would ask Penelope casually if Mina ever left her when they were out upon their walks.

Penelope was about to say 'No,' when she recollected that one day she had been left on a very slight pretext, for over half an hour, in a shieling, where Mina had been visiting a sick girl. Mina had said she had another call to make a short distance off — one not so interesting — she did not think Penelope would care to accompany her, and the person she had to visit might be rather overwhelmed, it might be too much for him, a poor man, if two ladies appeared upon the scene. Would Penelope kindly wait where she was?

Penelope had waited, and now admitted the fact.

The old woman drew closer to her. 'Was she lang awa?' whispered she, with a swift, keen glance.

'Long? Not very. About half an hour.'

'Lang eneugh. Noo, missy dearie,' Ailsie had not yet managed, she would aver, to 'come' Penelope's name, 'hark to me, like a guid bit bairnie.'

'You are very sweet to me to-day, Ailsie. Come, now; what's it for? What am I to do for you?'

'Oo, naethin' — just naethin'. Amn't I aye sweet t' ye?' retorted Ailsie, with well-feigned responsive jocularity. 'Gae wa wi' ye, noo, for your nonsense! Only, missy — I'm sayin', missy,' the smile fading from her lip; 'ye ken ye're a guid bairn.'

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'Oh, yes, Ailsie, I "ken" that, if I "ken" nothing else.'

'And ye can see a mony things, that it's no a'body whae sees ——'

'True for you, Ailsie. Butter me up! I can stand it.'

'Eh' but I'm no lauchin', my bairn. Gude kens! Aweel! what I wad say'—with a heavy sigh—'is just this. Meenie, she's no been weel guided—they're no ta'en her the richt way—she's been sair mishandled—aye, I tell 't them sae frae the beginnin', but they wadna hearken to me. Noo, it's amaist ower late; but let that be, we'll do what we can, you and me, an'—an' maybe anither.' Then, in a quick choking whisper, 'Dinna leave her to hersel', lassie. Dinna for a moment. Let her no quit your side—no, whatever she says.'

'My dear Ailsie, how can I help it? She has quitted my side at this very moment; she ran off from me when I came home just now.'

'Ran? Whaur did she rin?'

'Round to the farm,' she said, 'to see the cows milked. I am not so devoted to that nocturnal operation.'

'The kye milkit?' exclaimed Ailsie, as with a sudden terror. 'The milkin's ower lang syne. The byre was shut, and the door steekit, when I cam past the noo!.'

'Well, don't be alarmed. I know where to find her, at any rate. She goes up the burnside to the hollow beneath the first fall. It is a lovely evening; she has gone to be alone and follow her own thoughts. Ailsie, what is it you are afraid of?' Penelope had crossed the room towards the door, but now turned back as with a new thought. 'If you would only tell me, I would help you to guard against it. Is Mina liable to—has she ever had any sudden illnesses? You know what I mean? Is that why you are afraid of her being alone?'

Ailsie half shut her eyes and regarded her interlocutor with a peculiar expression. 'Aye, that's it,' she drawled slowly.

'Fits?'

'Aye—just fits. No' exactly the kind you mean, maybe; but guy queer fits, an'—an' no to be talked aboot.'

'Oh, of course not. I thought it must be something of that nature. She is so—so very odd sometimes. She flies out at

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me for nothing — she who is so meek and gentle — and looks so angry; she gets quite pale with anger — and then, when it is over, she seems almost frightened at herself, and as if she would do anything to make one forget it!'

'It's jist tantrums,' pronounced Ailsie, who had listened with almost breathless eagerness. 'Tantrums. Tak' nae heed. She's been misguided, I tell ye — misguided; that's a'. Only dinna leave her her lane, an' — ahem!' coughing with a very tolerable imitation of her mistress's discreet cough. 'What aboot yon at Inverashet, think ye? Is there ony chance o' him? No that I'm carin'. He's no oor rank ——'

'Which is "barons," Ailsie.'

'But gif he's dacent — an' they tell me he's raal dacent — an' gif her fayther an' mither 'll no be thrawn, and flout him as they did yon ither — eh, it wad be an unco' blessin'. Tell me, then, missy dearie, what think ye o' Redwood? Is there ony hope — ony chance?'

'No, indeed, Ailsie. I mean to have him for myself.'

CHAPTER XVII.

LORD CARNOUSTIE AND HIS FACTOR.

LORD CARNOUSTIE was scarcely more popular on his own estates than was Mr. John Soutter, his factor; and this was a very strange thing.

Scotch tenantry may adore their laird, but they invariably detest the factor. If he have a red face — or, worse still, a red nose — the result not so much of chronic indigestion as of constant exposure to sun and wind, to the frizzling rays of midsummer, and the rough coarse winds of winter, of hard wear and tear days in the prosecution of his stern calling — it is put down to a cause far less creditable.

If he be impervious to the whine of the impostor and just to exact the dues which he is aware can well be paid, he is a hard, griping man.

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If he likes, occasionally, to take part in the society to which his position admits him, but to which he is perhaps, strictly speaking, hardly entitled by birth, he is a truckler. In the vulgar mind he is neither a gentleman, nor altogether a servant.

Occasionally, it is true, when the factor happens to be a relation of the great man, he stands a better chance. He is then classed with 'the family;' and, although he may be disliked, contempt cannot be mingled with the aversion.

But when, as in the case of Mr. John Soutter, there was no tie of blood, nor even of matrimony, between him and those to whose interests he was devoted, it was, we repeat, rather a remarkable fact that he was welcome wherever he went, and that, in whatsoever company he had been, there was rarely ever an ill word spoken of him when his back was turned.

Nobody could help liking Mr. Soutter. Lady Carnoustie liked him — and to say that, says everything.

When Lady Carnoustie heard that Mr. Soutter was in the steward's room, she was nearly sure to send a message, with her compliments, to the effect that she would be glad to see Mr. Soutter before he left. When Mr. Soutter appeared, she had some small, very small, matter to lay before him. When Mr. Soutter replied, as he usually did, that he thought he could manage it, and that her ladyship need not trouble herself further, Lady Carnoustie would sigh as though a ton load were off her mind, and fervently rejoin that she had been sure all would be right if Mr. Soutter would only look into the affair, and take it in hand.

She always said of him, moreover, that Mr. Soutter knew when to go — and with her ladyship such knowledge was extremely important.

On her variable days, when the mercury in her mental thermometer was bobbing up and down at a rate that defied even Louisa and Joanna to keep pace with it, Mr. Soutter would be so quick and so cheery over the trifle he had to transact in the drawing-room, that he would be off and away before the cordiality of his greeting had had time to evaporate.

On other occasions, if he found the ladies dull and moping, and if he had no very pressing duties awaiting his attention, he

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would be persuaded to stay luncheon, and enliven the sederunt with a little countryside gossip.

The gossip was always, Lady Carnoustie pronounced, such as was fit to be heard at a gentleman's table. 'Mr. Soutter never says a word which I or my daughters cannot listen to with pleasure,' she had once emphatically rejoined to a little jocular banter on the subject. 'Carnoustie, I wish you were always as particular as Mr. Soutter.'

Whereupon Carnoustie would burst out laughing, and say to himself that Soutter knew which side his bread was buttered.

But, all the same, he was fain to own that Soutter was a worthy fellow, and a first-rate factor.

He would be annoyed with Soutter now and then, and vent his irritation pretty freely if Soutter, according to his views, deserved it; — but he was almost sure to look round by the grey stone house, with the pretty flower garden, yclept 'Glenmore,' before the day was over; and even if he had nothing in his hand — neither game, nor grapes, nor the *Queen* for the factor's sisters (borrowed from his own womenfolk as a pretext) — he would sit down with the two good creatures for an hour, and take occasion to let fall a remark here and there to show what a high opinion he had of their John.

To hear John so spoken of, and to entertain Lord Carnoustie seated in a big chair between the two, was bliss untold to Jean and Marianne Soutter. To be permitted once in a while to brew for him a cup of tea — which he never took when at home, but which he now accepted as though it were a refreshment his soul loved (it was these little intuitions which went straight to the hearts of Lord Carnoustie's humble neighbours) — to be right in remembering that he liked two lumps of sugar and a good deal of cream, to hear him say he preferred Jean's scones, and Marianne's black currant jelly, to 'loaf-bread' and butter, made a happy day for the simple souls.

John heard all about it when he came home. Perhaps John might still have been smarting under the morning's rebuke, and feeling sore and resentful towards the old lord, who had misunderstood and misrepresented him, from his point of view; perhaps he might have greeted the first joyous 'Lord Carnoustie

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has been here to-day,' with tokens not particularly expressive of satisfaction in the great event, — but he could never hold out long. For the next minute it would be, 'John, you should have heard how he spoke of you!' 'John, he thinks all the world of you!' 'He was telling us, John, how cleverly you could always be trusted to manage a troublesome business!' Or, best of all, 'He hopes, John, you don't mind his having rather a hasty temper? He was telling us to-day about his hasty temper. I said,' proceeded the speaker, Marianne, 'that I was sure none of us ever thought anything of that. For to be sure one must have something; and a hasty temper is just about the least thing one can have. And, indeed, we had never heard he had a hasty temper, — for you know, John, it's not a thing to speak about, the temper of a man like Lord Carnoustie, — and I am sure we would never be so disrespectful as to be making remarks whether he had one or no.'

John would comprehend perfectly what the old lord had been hinting at.

Then he would have to listen to the tale of how the kettle was just coming to the boil when Lord Carnoustie's grey hat was seen over the garden gate, of how little Katie, the tablemaid, had run 'ben' to inform them of the fact, and to whisper, should she bring in the tray? — of how they had thought it desirable to inquire his lordship's wishes first; and of how he had said quite heartily, and as if he had just been thinking about it, that there was nothing in the world he would like better than a good cup of tea.

By the time the narration had reached this point, John Soutter would have no further doubts in which direction the wind blew.

He knew Lord Carnoustie in and out, through and through; and knew that he himself had never in his life witnessed him accept either bite or sup from the tea-table at his own house; it must have been no ordinary penitence which had induced the crusty old gentleman whom he had left grunting him 'Good morning' with lowering brows at mid-day, to stump off to Glenmore at what he knew — who better? — to be the social hour, in order to participate voluntarily and cordially in its orgies.

Jean and Marianne might imagine it was chance which had

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brought their landlord that way at the auspicious moment, — John knew better.

He durst not confess thus much, lest the honour proving too transcendent, its recipients should be tempted to encroach; to insist on Lord Carnoustie's always taking tea when he called, and supposing that he had always been incited to offer this mark of esteem by feelings of remorse; but they heard no more complaints of the difficulties and vexations of a factor's life that day, nor for a good many days thereafter.

When next the two men met they would behave as usual. No remark would be let fall on either hand; but, while Lord Carnoustie was conscious of having made the *amende honorable*, Mr. Soutter was equally so of having tacitly accepted it. Thus they jogged along in harmony, mutual respect and goodwill easily smoothing over the inevitable ruffles on the surface of daily intercourse.

Lady Carnoustie had decreed the hour and the method of Penelope's first visit to the factor's family. This was scarcely a less important function than her introduction to nurse Alison; and as such it was conducted.

It would not do for Mina to run over with her cousin; Louisa — Miss Carnoustie — must escort the new-comer to Glenmore, and present her in due form. The Misses Soutter having been apprised of the event, would then be duly prepared, and it might be hoped that, if no adverse circumstances arose, all would go well.

Louisa had reported that all had gone very well indeed. Penelope had been very polite — indeed, most agreeable — to the Misses Soutter ('I am glad of that; I would not have had any guest of ours behave with coolness to the Misses Soutter for the world,' her mother had interpolated) — and had delighted both them and Mr. Soutter, who chanced to be at home, by her enthusiasm over the castle and its surroundings. N. B. Those were the days when Penelope was enthusiastic.

Mr. Soutter had hoped the young lady did not regret leaving the gay scenes of London for the peaceful country. The young lady had replied that anyone who could find anything to regret in such a spot as that to which she had now the good fortune

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to find herself transported, was only worthy of being sent back whence he or she came. She could think of no severer punishment.

Thereupon Jean and Marianne had straightway hung themselves, metaphorically speaking, round Penelope's neck, and even Louisa had privately told her mother afterwards that it was really delightful to go about with a companion who made such an impression.

Nor was the impression, as it turned out, on one side only. As time passed it was surprising how often Penelope's bright, inquiring face might be seen peering over the little gateway of Glenmore, and how often her fresh young voice, humble and deprecatory, yet laughing withal, was to be heard, crying 'Here I am again! You can't get rid of me! Don't say you want me to go away, Miss Soutter. Miss Marianne, mayn't I come in and stay a little?'

It was not only that Penelope could be happy, comfortable, at ease in the society of the homely sisters, it was that gradually, as the weeks went by, she found herself becoming more and more detached from the only companionship she had ever hoped anything from, after the first evening at Carnoustie Castle.

Her cousin Mina, who had begun by being friendly and communicative, had, by slow but sure degrees, frozen towards her.

Sometimes she fancied that she could fix the date at which the change began, and that it was on the Sunday after her arrival — that wet Sunday on which, it will be remembered, Redwood as well as Penelope had been in church for the first time, and had subsequently walked home by her side. If so, the latter would often muse — had Mina's subsequent coldness to do with this incident? It would be exaggerating its importance were it so; and, furthermore, it would hardly be in keeping with Mina's own attitude towards Redwood.

Redwood was obviously quite as much attracted towards Mina as she towards him. He had not, indeed, devoted himself so exclusively after his explanation with Penelope, having now no cause for shunning a London visitor, but still he was quietly attentive to the youngest Miss Carnoustie, whose modest,

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downcast demeanour suited his present state of mind precisely, and was rarely drawn from her side by the sprightly sallies of a mischievous maid, who was, he told himself, rather too much of the Mary Duberly order to be safe company for any man.

Mary had bewitched him by her gaiety, her raillery, her light-heartedness. He distrusted light-heartedness now. Mary had cajoled him, and despised him; he was on the look-out for being despised a second time.

Accordingly, while he was almost anxiously in earnest to prove his repentance sincere, and more than once went out of his way to render Penelope some little service, she could not imagine that Mina would be so foolish as to be jealous, supposing Mina cared about it.

No, it was not on Redwood's account that her cousin had withdrawn herself into her shell. On the contrary, if Redwood chanced to be the topic of conversation between the two, Mina would be more frank, chatty, and discursive than on other occasions. Once she even tried a little light badinage on this wise: 'Penelope, whom did I see escorting you home from Glenmore? Ah, naughty Penelope! The poor Jean — the poor Marianne! They think you go to see them, but I fear they are mistaken, eh, Penelope?' pinching her cousin's plump arm and smiling into her face.

The face reddened a little. 'If you think I went to Glenmore in order to meet Mr. Redwood, I may tell you at once I did nothing of the kind. I had no idea he was anywhere in that direction. If I had, I should not have supposed he was likely to be at the Soutters' house.'

'You did not know he was going there on Wednesday? He had never told you?'

'Told me? Of course not.'

'He had told *me*,' said Mina, nodding at her.

'And you thought — do you mean to say you thought,' cried Penelope, flushing up anew, 'that there had been an idea on my part, or on his part, that we had arranged a *meeting?* That I would stoop to such a thing? Would lower myself——'

'Why "lower"?' said her cousin, in a changed tone. 'I don't see how it should "lower" you.'

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'To appoint a place to meet a man — a mere neighbour — a ——'

'Ah, yes, a mere neighbour.'

'But *any* man,' persisted Penelope. 'I would not meet *any* man by appointment. It would be shockingly bad form.'

'Bad form? I don't understand your slang terms,' murmured Mina, with a wearied air. 'What is "bad form," may I ask?'

'Why, you know what the thing is, if you don't know the word. I say it would be shameful, abominable, degrading in me, or in you, or in any girl, to steal out on the sly to meet a ——,' she stopped short.

'A lover?' suggested her cousin, softly.

'Poh! What are you talking about?' Penelope burst into a shrill laugh. 'Lovers are not in the question. Neither of us has got a lover yet, my dear Mina, but when we have — or *if* we have — I think I can promise for us both that there shall be no clandestine appointments. Hey? What do you say? To be sure, the proverb goes, "All's fair in love and war," but still ——'

'Well, what?'

'It may be *fair* — just *fair*. I suppose it would be fair suppose one were being cruelly and unjustly treated,' a cloud of puzzled thought gathering on her young brow.

Mina pressed closer. 'Yes, yes?' she demanded, eagerly.

'But there are some things one could not stoop to' — again Penelope paused to think.

Her cousin was silent, waiting.

'I would fight in the open,' said Penelope at last; 'fight to the last drop of my blood; I should not mind fighting for anyone I cared for; but I would never, never, *never*' — then suddenly uplifting her hand and letting it fall by her side — 'so help me, God! I would *never* resort to a mean or underhand subterfuge.'

Without a word Mina burst from her; and thereafter, and for many days subsequently, shunned her society.

Penelope often felt terribly forlorn. She had been accustomed to being made so much of, run after, petted, and ad-

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mired. She had scarcely missed a mother's care in the indulgence of an easy-going father, and the worship of her little world.

Everyone had smiled upon Penelope heretofore. On quitting her own sphere for another, she had made no doubt that it would be equally easy to shine therein, and had even been amused by the barrenness of the sphere's first appearance on the night of her arrival.

They were a funny lot she had said, but she had supposed she should get along well enough with the funny lot nevertheless; and it was only after several weeks of the persistent trimming to which every sweet wild border in her nature was subjected at the hands of Lady Carnoustie and her subordinates, Louisa and Joanna, that she experienced a dull dejection of spirit which made her find nothing more in them to laugh at.

By this time, and very naturally, Redwood had become a prominent figure on her horizon. Had she met him elsewhere, under other circumstances, he might have been passed by without a thought; she saw dozens of men in town, who had the same air, figure, bearing, — and beyond these she really knew scarcely anything of her present neighbour; but from sheer lack of subjects for thought, and from a terrible discontent which was gradually creeping upon her, she grew to like Redwood a little.

CHAPTER XVIII.

'YOU WANT TO POACH UPON MY PRESERVE.'

On the Wednesday referred to by her cousin she had passed a pleasant hour at the factor's house. It was always pleasant there, peacefully, harmoniously pleasant; she would be allowed to do what she liked, and go where she chose; she would not be corrected, nor reminded, nor coughed at (she had grown to wince and tap her foot at Lady Carnoustie's little preliminary cough!); she would be permitted to run all over the house,

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rummage the good ladies' drawers, inspect their treasures, try on their caps.

And she was such a child, she liked to do all this. One day she dressed herself up completely in the black-flowered satin sacque of the defunct Mrs. Soutter, shrieking with delight over its balloon sleeves and short waist, and adding every ornament supplied by the good-natured sisters, till, mittens and all, she stood arrayed in the garb of fifty years before.

On another occasion she, tied up in a huge apron, and with sleeves rolled back to the elbow, baked oatcakes in the kitchen. The little handmaidens of the establishment thought they had never before had such a 'ploy,' or such a bonny and affable young lady come into the house.

Before they could look round she had caught up both their names and was using them. The castle ladies, it is true, also called them by their names, but with stiff, gracious, condescending intonation, such as made Katie and Flory inclined to drop a curtsey every time they were addressed.

When Miss Penelope ordered them about, they giggled with pleasure. They ran for her; they rushed to tell each other when she was coming; they never had anything to do in the house if she wanted one of them to take her in the boat, or to help her to find shells upon the shore.

Penelope never desired her own maid to walk with her, nor asked for an attendant from the castle. She did not want one from there; she knew nothing about the subordinate members of Lord Carnoustie's household, and Marie was just her French maid, who did her hair and made her dresses, and was about as good company as a pet lapdog. She was quite friendly with Marie, as she would have been friendly with any human being who did not maltreat her, — but there it ended.

The Highland lasses at the factor's cottage were different. She could talk with them, ask them questions, listen to their wild legends and countryside traditions, and feel as if she had been reading a fairy tale. It greatly pleased the two kindly mistresses that their little Katie and Flory should be so honoured.

To return, however, to the Wednesday in question.

Redwood had gone to call at Glenmore, having received a

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hint to do so from Lord Carnoustie. Lord Carnoustie was always anxiously particular that people should call on the Soutter family, and, fearful of such an attention being neglected, had a little formula in readiness for every new-comer.

'There is another fine specimen of an otter killed on the island, at Mr. Soutter's — my factor's,' he would say, having carefully introduced otters into the conversation. 'You'll see it when you go to call. Mind you ask Mr. Soutter to let you see it. Or, if he should be out, Miss Soutter will let you see it with pleasure. It is a remarkably fine otter. Tell me if you don't think so when you have seen it.'

The last remark, he considered, ensured the call's being made.

In the case of the new tenant of Inverashet it was certainly as well it had been appended, since Redwood had not had the slightest intention of calling either on the Misses Soutter or on anyone else. He had supposed anyone visitable in the place would call on him, as Lord Carnoustie had done, and rather hoped there was nobody within such range as to make the civility feasible. He had not taken into account Lord Carnoustie's factor, if the truth must be owned; and when presented to the burly bachelor, and the plain and homely maiden ladies on each side of him, had yielded only a slight and somewhat haughty bow. Out of humour with every kind of society, he had felt a momentary annoyance at being troubled even to bow.

But within a week he had received his hint, and had seen it would not do to neglect it. Lord Carnoustie was evidently in earnest. Lord Carnoustie was cordial and obliging towards him, and Lord Carnoustie was the only personage on the place. Lord Carnoustie must be obeyed.

He would get all the credit he could for the obedience, however; and to that end he had informed the young ladies of the family of his intentions. They had warmly approved, as had dear mamma when she heard the news, while Carnoustie was on tenterhooks to know how the visit would pass off.

But, as it chanced, no one had mentioned the subject before Penelope, and she was therefore entirely unconscious of any hidden meaning in the solemn observation, which amounted

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almost to an interdict, passed by Lady Carnoustie on anyone's going near Glenmore on the afternoon in question.

Lady Carnoustie had Mina in her mind — her darling, thoughtless Mina — who might from sheer heedlessness turn in to see their good friends, the Soutters, and find Redwood there — a terrible contingency to be provided against. She went so far as to desire Mina's company in the open carriage, which she had ordered round at three o'clock, the day being bright and tempting for a long drive.

Mina had offered no objection; indeed, she had none to make, for she had been perfectly indifferent on the subject, but Penelope had declined the other seat.

'Thank you, auntie, but I don't like driving,' she had replied, in her usual straightforward fashion, which did not give even Lady Carnoustie the offence it might have done, owing to its accompaniments of a blithe voice and winsome smile. 'I will have a prowl on the shore,' she had added, in all good faith.

Lady Carnoustie had graciously approved of the prowl on the shore, and driven off, waving her parasol to Penelope on the doorsteps.

Penelope, like a child, dropping from step to step and jumping up again, had suddenly bethought herself of something.

'No, I won't go to the shore,' she said, 'it's too hot. The sun will be simply baking on the shore. I'll go to the Soutters', and see if I can get Flory to teach me how to make "dropped scones." Good old Jean said I might come any day, so why not to-day?' And without even going into the house again, she had run off just as she was to Glenmore. Glenmore was so very near at hand that she had not even put on gloves.

'There, that's Penelope,' said Miss Soutter to her sister with a smile, as, seated in their little drawing-room doing the honours to the English stranger, and miserably at a loss for any means of making these interesting, she caught the sound of steps on the gravel outside. 'I thought that child would come to-day, somehow,' rising to go out. 'You'll excuse me, Mr. Redwood. I'll go and let her in myself. I'll not call the girls just for Penelope,' slipping away.

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Nor did she even shut the door behind her. Redwood, sitting by the open window that faced the sea, and endeavouring to spin out a decent length of time in weary conversation, was thus a spectator of the kiss which passed, and also caught distinctly the murmur of his own name, before his hostess drew her new visitor through the doorway.

'Kissing!' thought he. 'Oh, if they are on kissing terms, it is just as well I came, indeed. By Jove! I might have given great offence if I had not taken the hint. Well, but now I may go, I suppose,' and he rose to make one business of 'How d'ye do?' and 'Good-bye.'

'Oh, don't go just because I came!' cried Penelope, beholding the blank faces of the two old ladies. 'Do stop and talk here! *I* am going to the kitchen. Miss Jean, you said I might make "dropped scones" — may I? Is it a good day? Is Flory busy? Do say she isn't busy,' coaxing.

'Well, now, Penelope!' (she had made them call her 'Penelope,' representing that it was not the liberty they deprecated, since she was quite a different age from her cousins, even Mina being years older — 'You just call me Penelope,' she had settled the matter). 'Well, now, you see, we have visitors,' and Miss Jean turned her broad, kindly face towards Redwood, and patted the girl's hand to emphasise the difficulty.

Redwood's mouth opened to say he was going, but somehow he did not say it.

'I see,' Penelope assented, 'but the visitor will sit here — he'll be quite content,' nodding at him, 'while I go into the kitchen and make the scones. You will, won't you?' letting the old lady go and stepping up to Redwood. 'We need not interfere with each other. We need not come near each other. I don't want to sit in here — I don't, indeed. I did not come for that. Miss Jean knows I did not. Tell him so, Miss Jean.'

Anyone could have told how the matter would end.

Penelope — beseeching, expostulating, wiling, so pretty and so unmindful of it; for the time being a very child, and not even a vain child — was irresistible, and there was really nothing for it but to let her have her way.

Of course, anyone else present would have said our London

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young lady was executing with remarkable skill a fine piece of coquetry. She was doing nothing of the kind, and she was not even in a coquettish mood. She wanted Redwood to stay, and asked him frankly to do so because she cared about his doing so only from one point of view. He would keep the old ladies engaged, and leave her at liberty to make havoc in the kitchen.

That Penelope dearly loved to do. It was the only hindrance to her supreme satisfaction in baking and rolling that sometimes Miss Jean and Miss Marianne would keep passing round, suggesting and directing, instead of simply giving her what she wanted and letting her manage for herself, as it is the delight of youth and inexperience to do.

Miss Jean would try to preside over *her* scones — that annoyed Penelope. She could not say anything, because the good lady was so kind and so deeply interested; but she did wish that something would occasionally call off her hostess's attention, and let her have the girdle quite to herself.

Here was the requisite 'something' ready to her hand in the shape of Mr. Charles Redwood. He must not be permitted to escape. And this was the real, true, unvarnished fact as regarded Penelope's warmth of invitation towards the Misses Soutter's visitor.

They mistook it, but he did not.

He stayed, and was better pleased to stay than if a hundred feminine wiles had been practised upon him with a view to touching his heart. He was quite at ease with Penelope now.

When she had finished her baking, she found him in the little garden outside, tying up Miss Soutter's roses; and, on her appearance, he offered to see her home, as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

To Penelope it was so. She thought nothing of it. She only thought that Redwood was no longer rude and unfriendly — nay, that he was more cheerful, kind, responsive than she had ever before beheld him; in consequence, easier to get on with. They found plenty of topics to dwell upon, succeeding in finding several subjects of mutual interest, and stood for some time talking at the castle gates ere they parted.

Then Penelope ran up beneath the arching pines, singing

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softly to herself; and Redwood pursued his way with spirits insensibly cheered and brightened. She was a nice girl after all, and he had made it up with her. That was what he thought.

From a long way off Mina Carnoustie had seen the two figures emerge from the factor's house. They had been prominent from time to time, and she was long-sighted. She had said nothing, having got into a habit of saying nothing; but she had wondered within herself who could be issuing forth from Glenmore porch at that hour, and why they moved towards the promontory which overhung the bay, and stood still there.

It was not like the worthy Misses Soutter to be attracted by the beauties of Nature.

As the distance lessened, she had perceived the pair to be Redwood and Penelope, and had been faintly amused, while still keeping such amusement a close secret. There was, she thought, no need to draw her mother's attention to a coalition which might be productive of unpleasantness; and as the carriage had turned up the avenue, whilst yet the walkers were a hundred yards off, behind a bend in the bay, they had entirely escaped Lady Carnoustie's eye. The carriage had disappeared when they reached the lodge gates.

For several hours Mina had kept to herself the fact that she had spied the sly Penelope and her companion, but at length the promptings of her breast induced the passage at arms above narrated. She had longed to catch Penelope tripping, and had desired nothing more than that such tripping should have been accomplished in company with her own supposed admirer.

Penelope had turned the tables in a way she herself little suspected.

Mina was growing to be more and more of a puzzle; more and more of a curious, unsatisfactory, disappointing companion.

There were no more walks and talks now. By tacit consent the two girls would separate as soon as they were out of sight of the other members of the family, and on the slightest pretext, or even without one, Mina would say, 'Which way are you going? You generally like the shore, don't you?' and betake herself forthwith in an opposite direction.

Once or twice Penelope said she would go on the rocky moor-

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land for a change. It struck her that her cousin did not like this; and, on one occasion, Mina even went so far as to retort, 'Why should you not keep to your own choice? You chose the shore; you said you preferred it, and now you want to poach upon my preserve!'

Penelope turned humbly away. It hurt her to perceive that her very presence was esteemed 'poaching,' for she had intended to accompany her cousin, not to oust her from her own dominions.

'Nobody seems to want me,' she murmured sorrowfully to herself. 'Even papa writes that he is getting along famously, and has no doubt I am doing the same. He never says a word about missing me, and I can't worry him with my troublesome little life. I said I would come here, so here I am bound to remain. I must abide by my own decision, or I should be "poaching" on someone else's "preserve," I suppose,' with a faint smile. 'What an odd remark that was of Mina's! and how strangely she looked at me as she made it. If it had been anyone else, I should have said her face was white with passion, but passion is not in Mina's nature. She does not know what it is to be warmed up to a good honest rage; only every now and then she says a nasty thing with white lips. But why should she have said a nasty thing to-day, I wonder? I did nothing to call it forth: I had not teased her, nor plagued her; in fact, we had been rather jovial — for us — this afternoon, and that was why I made so bold as to think my company might be acceptable. It *was* unkind of her to snub me for it,' her heart swelling at the recollection, 'and to be so rough — so bitter. Well!' with a little sigh, 'well, I must go off to that old shore, I suppose. It is a good time for the shore, certainly. The tide is coming in, and I love to hear it lapping against the rocks. Perhaps I may get some sea-weed for my collection,' and she sauntered away.

Within an hour she came back, not liking the look of the sky, and found Lady Carnoustie rather fretting about Mina's absence. There was thunder in the air, she said. She was sure a storm was brewing, and Mina would be caught in it out on the open moor. She was surprised to learn Penelope had not been with Mina;

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she had understood that when not driving with her, or visiting the cottages with the elder sisters, these two were always together. Penelope looked at the speaker in surprise. She had not walked with Mina for a fortnight.

She had sounded Mina on the point, and Mina had asseverated that solitary rambles were quite *de rigueur* in a place like theirs, where they were known to everybody, and where no danger was to be feared, either from man or beast. 'Papa won't have any of those great Highland bulls loose,' she had concluded. 'He was once run after, and he makes every farmer on the estate shut up his bulls now.'

'But Ailsie does not altogether like your wandering about on the moor alone.'

'Ailsie is a dear old goose. She thinks I am no more fit to take care of myself than when I was being carried in her arms. But, of course, it makes me say as little about it as possible,' added Mina, with the swift, furtive glance her cousin had learned to connect with this subject. 'I have told her once for all that I am safe — perfectly safe — and she must be content with that. *I* have no fears, no scares, when I am — alone — on the moor.'

A light shone in her eye; in her tone there was a subdued ring of exultation.

'How do you know you are so very safe?' demanded Penelope, with a confused suspicion of something amiss.

'Have I not told you? There is someone there who watches over me — who haunts those wild moors, and traverses those solitudes from end to end. I am never out of his sight ——'

'Oh, Torquil, the shepherd!'

'Yes, Torquil, the shepherd!' The light derision of Penelope's accents was caught up and echoed with mocking significance. 'Torquil Macalister, the poor Highland farmer's son. He's nobody, you know — not worth considering. We never take anyone into consideration unless he has his eight quarterings — his gallery of ancestors — his escutcheons ——'

'What on earth are you talking about?' cried Penelope, staring. 'Are you ——' She would have said 'mad,' but the word died on her lips.

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Mina snapped her fingers scornfully. 'You needn't be afraid,' she retorted. 'I never talk like that before people. Come, do I now? You can see for yourself I don't. But it's true, all the same — true, whoever says it. We Carnousties are fools — fools ——.' Her voice fell; her head sank upon her breast.

Penelope stole away. She had grown to be almost afraid of her cousin by this time.

CHAPTER XIX.

MINA'S LOSS UPON THE MOOR.

But when Mina's mother wanted to know where Mina was, and seemed uneasy and disturbed about her, the sunny kindliness of spirit which always inclined Penelope to put herself forward when anyone was in trouble, prompted her to offer at once to go and seek her cousin.

'I know where she is sure to be found, auntie,' she averred, brightly. 'Don't you be afraid. I'll fetch her down. She has only gone up the burnside to her favourite nook below the first fall; such a lovely spot, all overhung with birches and rowan trees! — we often go there together; at least,' hastily, 'we used to go, but lately I have been oftener on the shore. Take my word for it, Mina is there, and I'll rout her out and bring her in.'

It seemed inhuman to send her, but Mina's mother was really getting alarmed, and Penelope caught a glance towards the window.

'I'll go. I'm not afraid,' she cried, catching up the straw hat she had thrown aside, and flying out at the door.

'She is really very obliging,' murmured Lady Carnoustie from the sofa. 'I hope it was not unkind to let her go, but if a storm should come on ——'

The door opened and the Misses Soutter were announced.

'Oh, Miss Soutter,' cried her ladyship with relief, as though the very sight of the worthy spinsters allayed apprehensions,

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'pray come in! I am so happy to see you! You are not afraid of a thunderstorm, then? Mina is still out, and I am rather uneasy about her; so Penelope has kindly gone to bring her in. You did not meet Mina by any chance, did you?'

They had not: they had simply walked between the two houses, and met no one.

'The dear child is so fond of her country freedom,' pursued Lady Carnoustie, with a fond smile, 'and one must not put old heads on young shoulders, must one, Miss Soutter? Miss Marianne, will you not take a more comfortable chair? Walking in such sultry weather is very fatiguing. Joanna, my dear, bring a footstool.'

The good sisters always said they never could understand anyone's calling Lady Carnoustie proud. They could only say *they* had never seen her proud. She never showed the very smallest atom of pride towards *them;* and to be sure, when she could be so kind and condescending to two such humble bodies, it was a shame to suppose she would be less so to their betters.

They had not, you perceive, studied the science of arrogance.

They now accepted with joyful alacrity and gratitude every token of her ladyship's good-will. Miss Soutter inserted herself — ashamed of the amount of room she took up — in the seat of honour at the other end of the sofa; Miss Marianne, with profuse apologies, permitted Joanna to place a chair for her on the opposite side of the rug. Both were thus well within Lady Carnoustie's range.

That settled, Lady Carnoustie eyed her satellites benevolently. 'You good souls,' the eye said, 'you have come here to bask for a little in the sunshine of my presence. It is a natural and laudable desire, and shall be gratified. I am pleased with you, Misses Soutter. You are two estimable, inoffensive, harmless creatures. Your brother is a very worthy servant, and you are all our faithful retainers. Be happy, then; be at ease — in moderation; and be rejoiced to feel that so long as you know your place, and do your duty in the humble position in which Providence has placed you, we, your superiors, will continue to afford you our countenance, and permit you to enjoy — at proper intervals — our society.'

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As this was entirely in accordance with their own feelings — as indeed it precisely met the case, to their view — the cheerful couple were soon contentedly prattling away, and the odds and ends of countryside news, which they had loyally collected to lay before the feet of their liege lady, were brought forth one by one.

'You will have heard that Mr. Macintyre's eldest son — the wild one they have always been something anxious about — is back upon their hands, Lady Carnoustie? A terrible thing, is it not? Most unfortunate those poor Macintyres always are! You will remember the son — the big, red-headed one? Hector. He used to work at the ferry. I believe he once helped Finlayson in the garden for a few weeks.'

Lady Carnoustie remembered Hector perfectly. She remembered that he had not been satisfactory in the garden; that Finlayson had complained of him, and she was sorry to hear he had not done better elsewhere.

'Indeed, it is a sad pity for the poor Macintyres. Such respectable people, as your ladyship knows,' proceeded Miss Jean, who had opened the ball. 'I fancy they are a little weak and foolish perhaps about their children, if one may say so. One should not be hard on them, poor people, but still we do think, and so does John.— for I have heard him say so many and many a time — that neither father nor mother had the young ones in enough of a grip, so to say. It does not do to make overmuch of young people,' and Miss Jean shook her head wisely.

'No, indeed; it is the great mistake of the age.' (Well did they all know how Lady Carnoustie would rise to the bait.) 'Indeed, what you say is only too true, Miss Soutter,' tone and voice intimating, 'although it is only you who say it.'

'I knew how you would feel, Lady Carnoustie: I said to Marianne directly we heard Hector was back — for John brought word when he came home from his rounds last night; he had passed the Macintyres, and saw Hector himself, so we knew it must be true — I said, Lady Carnoustie will not be surprised to hear it; for you had always told us it was such a mistake to let the young people get ahead, and I am sure,

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with your experience' — looking round admiringly at the elderly young ladies, and feeling that no further words were necessary to point a moral.

'I am afraid Mrs. Macintyre must be a very foolish woman,' said Lady Carnoustie, with approving severity. 'She brings her troubles on herself; and though, of course, I am sorry for her, and she and her husband are among our most respectable tenants, I cannot help remarking that I have always feared the children would not turn out well.'

The subject was then discussed in all its bearings.

But Miss Marianne has presently another to introduce, and one more agreeable to the kind hearts of the sisters, if not quite so edifying in the opinion of their patroness.

'There's a talk of a wedding at the Point, Lady Carnoustie. Maggie Maconochie — little Maggie who was with us before Katie came — is to be married to the new schoolmaster. Quite a match for Maggie! She's but a slip of a girl; she was hardly strong enough for our work — that was how we had to part with her, and sorry we were to do it, for she was a pretty, good-tempered, willing little lass. Only she really had not strength to work; so it's a good thing she is to be settled early. And the schoolmaster's house is really an excellent one, and he has seventy pounds a year. Maggie will be quite set up.'

'Dear me! How very nice! I am so glad.' It was Miss Joanna who thoughtlessly interfered. Had she waited another minute Lady Carnoustie might herself have said, 'How very nice!' But it was not Joanna's place to put her opinion before her mother's.

'May I ask on what grounds you pronounce so decidedly, Joanna?' Joanna started; the maternal accents were threatening. 'Because of the good house, or the seventy pounds a year? Miss Marianne has informed us of nothing beyond these items to make you so very certain of the marriage being a desirable one. I must say I think your congratulations are a shade premature.'

'Oh, but, indeed, Lady Carnoustie' — the worthy Marianne half left her chair, and stuttered with eagerness — 'I do assure you Miss Joanna is right. It is really an excellent marriage.

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Mr. Davidson — that's his name — is a most worthy young man, and his abilities are really — really quite — quite out of the common. He had over a dozen testimonials — all of the highest quality. Oh, I am told he is most superior! And Maggie says he has been an extremely good son to his old parents, and he writes shorthand. When Jean and I heard of it, we just held up our hands and said, "To think of little Maggie!"'

'To be a good son is certainly a recommendation, and I have no reason for supposing the young man is not likely to get on.' Lady Carnoustie was mollified. 'I merely wished to point out to my daughters how easy it is to be misled on such occasions, and how careful one ought to be to have solid grounds for approbation, before bestowing it so freely.'

'Oh, certainly, certainly, Lady Carnoustie! But I do assure you, Maggie really is most fortunate. John thinks so too.'

'If you and your good brother are satisfied, I need no further testimony.' Lady Carnoustie waved her hand as putting aside every other consideration. 'You are thoroughly cognisant of the circumstances of the case, and are able to form an impartial judgment; but for Joanna to be bursting out with, "How very nice!" before she had even heard the man's name ——'!

It was well that Penelope was not present. Penelope would to a certainty have committed herself here, or soon after, for what with the atmospheric influences, to which Lady Carnoustie was sensitive, and the little uneasiness about Mina, and one or two other minor irritations too trivial for mention, there was no knowing what she would say next, nor how she would take anything said by another.

The first feeling of satisfaction in seeing her visitors had evanesced, and though she was still glad to have them there, and would not permit them to depart, by the end of half an hour even they had had about as much as they could stand of it.

Still the storm did not come on, nor the absentees come in. Let us see what detained them.

When Penelope first flew swiftly out, she made sure of finding Mina at once — indeed, thought it quite likely that before she could reach the garden door, or, at any rate, run down the slope

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beyond, she would catch sight of light drapery among the shrubs, and would only need to hasten her cousin's footsteps by proclaiming her mission, in order to enable them both to get safely back to the house within a few minutes.

Mina was usually punctual to return home before she was missed, and had never before now needed to be sent after. Penelope had an idea that she was careful to give no offence by want of attention on this point, and that the sight of a messenger sent expressly to fetch her home would not be a welcome one.

'But what could I do?' she meditated. 'The poor woman was growing black in the face; and it does look remarkably like being a bad storm. How inky and ragged those clouds are! I only hope it will keep off till I have chevied home this wandering sheep. Where can she be?'

Not in the wood, that was certain.

A long zigzag path lay in front, and no one was stepping down from the moor that way. Penelope looked rather ruefully upwards. She was not only a little reluctant to attack the ascent, which was steep and stony, but was unpleasantly conscious of the fact that it was thickly overhung by trees, and that she had been warned that a wood was not a safe place in a thunderstorm.

Suppose the storm broke? It might break at any moment. Yet she was going further and further away from home, and would have to return every step she now took!

And suppose Mina were not on the moor at all? She had said she was going there, it was true, and had been cross and rude when fearful of being thwarted in her intended expedition, but that was not to say she would carry it out after all.

'She does tell such strange lies,' muttered Penelope, as she plodded on, 'as if for the sheer pleasure of telling them! At least, I have never found out any other reason. She has more than once announced she was going somewhere, and I have seen her with my own eyes flying as fast as she could in another direction! Then, she has often such extraordinary reasons for doing things. And as for her explanations — oh, my good aunt, she does sail uncommonly near the wind in some of her expla-

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nations, I assure you! It is not my business to correct her — not my "place," as you would say yourself. (You are great at teaching us all our "place," from Carnoustie downwards.) But if you only knew! Yes,' after a few minutes, 'yes, I would give something to see your face if you knew all. Failing that, I would give something to see Mina's now. It is rather too bad that I should have to come all this way toiling and straining after her. There she is, *miles* away! Oh, this *is* too bad!' as her eye caught a glimpse of a light figure in motion on a little knoll on the skyline to the left. 'Mooning about up there like an idiot! Oh, come *down*, you tiresome thing!' apostrophising the distant object. '*Come down*, can't you? Anyone but you would see there is going to be a thunderstorm; and you don't want to get wet through to the skin, I suppose, even if you don't care about getting killed? You are too cracked to take that contingency into consideration, I dare say. Well, now,' standing still to consider, 'what does it behove me to do? I am not going to scour the moor, yelling and screeching, after this lunatic. If I had brought a dog whistle! Another time I will; there is one hanging up in the gun-room. But now — what is to be done now? I may shout till I'm hoarse — she will never hear me; and as for her seeing — what in the world is she doing?' in new consternation. 'She is walking up and down — round and round! There she goes back to where she was! Oh, for a pair of opera-glasses! Why did I leave my opera-glasses at home? I should soon have seen — but no, that would have been spying, not seeing. Penelope East, what are you thinking of? Playing the spy, you mean girl! You would reduce yourself to the level of Mina Carnoustie, would you? Bah! For shame! Well, but,' again eyeing the heights in search of an inspiration, 'now, what *am* I to do? There she goes! Back again! Crazy creature! Well, I'll try a shout,' suiting the action to the words.

To her surprise, it was instantly productive of result, though not in the manner anticipated. A rustling was heard in the wood behind, and the next minute a man sprang over the low wall, about fifty yards off, who, touching his cap respectfully, inquired if he could be of service.

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'Indeed you can,' replied Penelope, gratefully recognising Macalister, the shepherd. 'I am trying all I can to make one of the young ladies hear, but she is such a long way off,' pointing to the knoll. 'There! You can see her now on the sky-line. She is walking backwards and forwards; and there is a storm coming up ——'

'Aye, there is. Miss Mina should come in before the storm is upon us.'

'Can you see which it is?' inquired Penelope, with astonishment. She had mentioned no name. But Torquil Macalister smiled.

'I can see a bit further than that,' he said. 'Will I whistle, or send the dogs?' indicating the collies panting at his heels.

'Oh, whistle! She might be afraid of the dogs.'

Penelope was shrinking back a little herself.

'Her afraid!' Torquil smiled again. 'Miss Mina knows my dogs, and they her; they would almost as soon obey her as me. Will I whistle then, if you please?' and he stood cap in hand, with the air of awaiting a command.

'Pray do, if you think she can hear.'

The next moment a wild, sweet note rang over the moor, and repeated itself with variations.

'Surely I have heard that cry before!' exclaimed the young lady, struck by a recollection. 'I thought it was some bird. I used to think what a musical cry that bird had. Do you whistle to your dogs, Torquil?'

'Sometimes I do, ma'am; but not that way. They have their own whistle. I keep this for others. See,' pointing upwards, 'she hears. She is coming. Shall I make her come faster?'

'As fast as you can. Yes, I see now that she has left the knoll. I suppose she guesses she is wanted at home. Perhaps you have had to recall her before now?' suggestively.

'I can call Miss Mina from any part of the moor. See now,' he sent forth another clear, pure, wandering note, with a different termination. 'See,' he said, pointing.

Mina was running.

'That meant "Come faster,"' explained the shepherd, turn-

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ing to his companion. 'Miss Mina knows she can trust me not to warn her like that unless there is danger, either from weather or cattle. We had wild cattle on the moor at one time, and they was not vera safe,' his accent becoming slightly more accentuated as he grew conversational. 'Some of them was young bullocks — vera fine bullocks — but young. They would be a bit frightened themselves when they would see strangers, so that made them wild and a little fierce, and it was not nice for ladies. But one day his lordship was the one that was chased, and since then we have had no cattle on the moor. Miss Mina was vera glad, and I was not sorry myself. The dogs was always in trouble with those wild cattle.'

'I suppose it is a perfectly safe place now?'

'It is perfectly safe for those that know it. There are bogs, precipices, and the mists come down ——'

'Oh, say no more! I have been in a bog, and I have no desire to fall over a precipice. As for the mists, Torquil, could you not go and help Miss Mina — she was nearly down then — and tell her not to be alarmed, it is only I who am waiting; and the storm looks no nearer than it did; it may keep off altogether now. Miss Mina need not *run*.'

He had saluted her and was off.

Penelope turned round and found a mossy rock whereon to sit and watch proceedings.

It was hard to say which of the two now approaching each other cleared the ground with most rapidity. Mina, apparently either impelled by fear or some other powerful motive, was taking advantage of every piece of smooth grass or sheep-run which came directly in her path, to skim along still more swiftly than could be done when broken ground obstructed her progress. The shepherd, striding straight over every obstacle, neither increased nor slackened his pace as occasion offered.

In a very few minutes they met.

Penelope marked a brief halt, and perceived, or fancied she perceived, the extended arm of Torquil Macalister pointing towards herself. She then expected to see him rendering the young lady such assistance as the rough walking made desirable if speed were in the question, but to her surprise, after a brief

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colloquy, her cousin again started alone to run down hill, while the stalwart Highlander struck off at right angles in the direction of the grassy knoll she had quitted, on which he presently proceeded to pace up and down precisely as Mina had been doing when first sighted.

All at once light broke in upon Penelope.

'How stupid I am! She must have lost something, and was trying to find it when she was patrolling that height, and now she has set Torquil to look. She has got the right man. He has eyes like an eagle — clear, yellow eyes, that let nothing escape. He will find anything there is to find.'

'Ho, Mina!' she cried, as soon as it was likely her voice would be heard, 'what have you lost? I saw you hunting about for something, and I thought you had gone "clean wud," as Tosh said the other day. You did cut a droll figure mooning up and down on that one little bit of ground, until the mystery was solved. I suppose you have told Torquil to hunt now. What is it?'

Mina was panting with her run.

'Nothing, — a — a pencil,' she replied, pulling up her skirts for a last spring, which landed her safe by her cousin's side. 'How could you see what I was doing?' Then turning her eyes towards the spot, 'I am sure I could not have told what anyone was about up there.'

'No more could I, but I put two and two together. I saw you in the teeth of a gathering storm — it is going to pass off, I believe, all the same,' in parenthesis — 'I saw you just when the sky was at its blackest placidly trotting up and down and round and round, like a circus pony; and, to confess the truth, at first I could not imagine what was up. But when I saw you despatch the beauty shepherd off to the same place, and perceived that he, too, began to perform the same incomprehensible gyrations, the light flashed on my bewildered brain.'

'Oh, yes, it was a favourite little pencil,' said Mina. 'I have had it a long time. I don't like losing my things; I get fond of them! Torquil says he is sure to find it, but I don't believe he is. I have been over the ground so often. It must have caught my eye. It would have glittered.'

'Glittered? Was it gold?'

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'No, silver. Such a pretty pencil-case! Large and handsome, Penelope.'

The speaker hesitated.

'Well?'

'Please do not say anything about my loss to the rest. They would worry about it. It is bad enough to lose something one values, without being lamented over and scolded.'

'Yes, I know.'

'Of course it was careless. I should not have taken a handsome silver pencil-case out on the moor, but I did.'

'What made you think it was on that particular spot?'

'I missed it there. I fancied I felt it fall off ——'

'A pencil-case fall off?'

'Fall out, I mean — out of my pocket.'

'You are sure you had it with you?'

'Perfectly sure.'

'In your pocket?'

'No, fastening my —— yes, to be sure, in my pocket.'

'Oh, in your pocket.' (Mentally: 'A large, handsome silver pencil-case, valued by its owner, but the loss not to be publicly adverted to. Yet she has shown me all her treasures, and I have never seen nor heard of this pencil-case before; and it must be an odd kind of pencil-case, too, to "fall off" a person, and to fasten something she wears. Somehow,' said Penelope to herself, as in silence the two pursued the homeward path side by side — 'somehow I have a curious — a very curious — fancy that there is no such thing as this silver pencil-case.')

CHAPTER XX.

'WON'T YOU HAVE A NICE BRIGHT SIXPENCE, TOSH?'

It chanced that on the very next day Penelope was to have her suspicions confirmed.

She was out by herself in the grounds, when she beheld coming towards her the half-witted vagrant, with whose harmless

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presence she was now familiar, and who was always gratified by the interchange of a friendly word.

Tosh had not been up to the castle since his illness, having his own notions of delicacy, which prompted him to consider that, having enjoyed so much of his friend Carnoustie's hospitality, and been nursed and fed for five or six days — an endless time to his ideas — he ought not to reappear too soon. Accordingly he had let some weeks pass before he turned his wandering feet again in the direction of Carnoustie Castle, and no one had seen or heard of him in the meantime.

'Good morning, Tosh,' said Penelope, cheerfully. 'Are you quite well again now, Tosh?'

'I'm a wee thing better, my leddy.' Tosh always 'my leddy'd' every member of the family. 'Just a wee thing,' added he, not willing to allow too much. 'I'm haudin awa up to the castle, to see hoo Mistress Alison's keepin'. She will be expectin' me, syne she's had nane o' me for sae lang. I'll awa noo,' somewhat hastily endeavouring to brush past.

'What have you got in your hand, Tosh?'

'Me got i' my haun'? Hannt got naetin' i' my haun'. I'm just haudin' awa up to the castle ——'

'But what is it, Tosh? I see something shining.'

'What's what?' said Tosh, doggedly. 'Na, ye see naethin',' endeavouring to hide a glitter within his huge palm, and finally putting it behind him. 'Let me gang past. I'm no hinnering ye; ye hae nae ca' to hinner me.'

'Tosh,' said Penelope, decidedly, 'you must let me see what you are hiding there in your hand.'

'Whilk haun?' demanded Tosh to gain time, and looking from one side to the other for means of escape.

But Penelope's resolution was now fairly roused. 'It may be the thing Mina lost,' conjectured she, by accident hitting the mark. 'I must get it out of him.'

'Now, Tosh,' in kind yet arbitrary accents, 'it is no use your trying to deceive me, you know. You have found something nice and pretty, which you want to keep to yourself; and so you are holding it behind your back, in order that I may not see it. That is not good of you, Tosh,' shaking her head at

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him. 'You have no right to keep what you find on Lord Carnoustie's property, because it belongs to Lord Carnoustie — at least,' hastily, 'it probably belongs to him or some of his family; and you ought to find out if it does, and give it back.'

'Na; I winna gie it back.'

'Then, Tosh, you are a thief.'

'Na; I am no a thief,' sullenly.

Penelope paused to consider. Obviously she would gain nothing by attempting to overawe the poor fool, who was in his own way strictly honest, and conscious of being so. She would simply get as good as she gave, if she pursued that tack. It was unfair, and Tosh knew it to be unfair, and was quite equal to being resentful and determined. He would not have stolen so much as a crust of bread belonging to a lawful owner, but it seemed to him that he had come by the pretty thing found lying on the moorland road, in a perfectly honest fashion; that it was nobody's, and in consequence his own. He should not have been termed a thief for keeping what he had picked up on the hillside! His brawny fist closed firmly round the treasure, and he looked at his interlocutor with the expression of a dumb animal brought to bay.

'I am bound to get it out of him, however,' said Penelope to herself.

Then she tried again.

'You know, Tosh, how very kind Lord and Lady Carnoustie and the young ladies are to you. How Mrs. Alison feeds you with good broth and nice things, when you are ill! How she lets you come into her own sitting-room — her own sitting-room where very few people are let in — and get warm by the fire on cold days ——'

'Aye, but it's no cauld the day.' Tosh felt he could dispense with the fire in broiling July at noontide, and he had never room in his mind for more than one idea at a time.

'You'll be hungry by-and-by, Tosh.'

'Aye, maybe.' Even on that subject Tosh was cool. He had had a 'piece' not long before.

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'Don't you think it is very unkind of you to try to keep back anything from your good friend Lord Carnoustie?'

'Carnoustie's weel eneugh — weel eneugh,' impatiently. He was not going to give up his pretty thing, and he did not see what Carnoustie had to do with it.

'I think you are very ungrateful, Tosh.'

'Ungratefu'? Me, ungratefu', whae to? Is't you?' Tosh had hit upon a bright idea. 'What for am I ungratefu' to you? I ken naethin' aboot you. You're no ain o' oorsels. You're a strynger. We want nae stryngers i' these pairts,' washing his hands of her unchivalrously, and again making a movement to hurry past.

Thus frustrated, Penelope was almost giving up the game, but, like other wise people in this mercenary world, she bethought her of one final effort, not usually unsuccessful.

'Look here, Tosh! You are fond of a sixpence, Tosh?'

Tosh's eyes glistened.

'Aye, guy fond. Hae ye a saxpence aboot ye?'

'Yes, I have.' Penelope pulled out her purse. By luck she had it in her pocket, having been down to the little post-office to send off a letter to her father. Not feeling certain that the postage to Jamaica would be understood by the footman, whose duty it was to take down the letter-bag, she had attended to the matter herself, and now rejoiced in having done so.

'See here, Tosh, what's this?'

Tosh prudently drew nearer and inspected the coin between her fingers at close quarters before replying.

Then 'I'm thinkin' it's a saxpence,' he advanced cautiously.

'A nice bright sixpence, Tosh. It would buy a heap of things —black sugar at the shop, and hooks for your rod, and string ——'

'I ken fine what it wad buy.'

'I know you do. And you want some hooks, don't you? You fish off the pier, for I have seen you.'

'No that muckle. It's no guid fishin' weather.' Tosh cunningly affected indifference. He began to perceive the drift of the conversation.

'Oh, is it not? Then perhaps you don't care about the sixpence. Perhaps they have no black sugar at the shop just now.'

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And Penelope, not to be outdone, pretended to drop the coin into her purse again.

Tosh fell into the trap at once.

'Nae black sugar at the mairchant's!' cried he. 'Aweel, I saw it mysel' i' the window as I cam' by the noo. Ye'll gie me yon saxpence,' and his arm began to steal round from the back. He was obviously wavering.

'I'll give it you, Tosh.' Once more it was held up before his eyes temptingly. 'I'll give it you with pleasure now that you are a good Tosh, and are going to give me what is in your hand. You know, Tosh, that, whatever it is, it is of no use to you, and whoever sees it would take it from you ——'

'Na; I'll no let them.'

'You would never be able to bring it out, because someone would ask you about it, and where you got it, and Lord Carnoustie would hear of it, and be vexed with you, and you would have to let it go after all, Tosh; whereas now, if you take this nice sixpence and go down to Davy Cameron's, where the black sugar is ——'

Tosh suddenly snatched the sixpence from her hand, and flinging something out of the other, which rang upon the hard ground like a piece of metal, ran stumbling off in the direction indicated.

'Aha!' murmured Penelope, lifting up the castaway and turning it over in her fingers. 'Oho! Indeed? Yes, I thought so. Mina's silver — pencil — case!'

Mina's 'silver pencil-case,' if such the treasure-trove proved indeed to be, was of a peculiar shape and fashion not generally recognised.

'I don't call this a very useful kind of "pencil-case" now,' observed Penelope, holding up before her a massive silver shawl brooch, deeply engraved, of a pattern frequently seen among the kilted clans of Scotland, 'and I should not have supposed there was much fun in calling it by that name. *I* call this article a brooch, and a very handsome brooch, too. Ha! What have we here?' investigating more closely. 'What is this? Initials engraved among the leaves and thistles? Initials? No, good heavens, no! It is a name. It is "Mina!"'

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'"Mina," it is indeed,' exclaimed Penelope, after a pause of mingled exultation and amazement. '"Mina," as large as life, or rather as clear as day, for it is hardly large. Anyhow, this is Mina's brooch, and here is Mina's name, and there are no two "Minas" in the Isle of A. I have found my dear cousin out in another little specimen of her peculiar temperament. She loses a brooch, and tells me she has lost a pencil-case! She tells no one else she has lost anything whatever. She goes to the drawing-room and says she was only in the grounds, whereas I spied her up against the sky-line on the moor! The good Soutter women pat her on the shoulder, and are afraid she has hurried in "to see them." She says, "Oh, it was no distance to hurry!" whereas all my powers of lung might have been exhausted in vain to make her hear if Torquil Macalister had not come to the rescue! What I want to know is, *what is the meaning* of all this?' with sudden fire. 'What is this girl up to, that she requires so much fibbing? Ailsie knows, or I'm mistaken; but Ailsie does not mean to tell me, and puts me off by pretending Mina has fits. Fits? Fiddlesticks! She has no more fits than I have. If they thought she had, moreover, would they be so eager to let me be with her all day long? Ailsie telling me never to leave her! No, it is not fits, and I don't know what it is; but of one thing I am pretty sure by this time — no one suspects anything but Ailsie, and Ailsie does not intend me to share her suspicions.

'Now what about this pretty ornament?' Penelope next debated with herself. 'How shall I restore it to its owner? Before everybody, and see what she would say? I have no reason to suppose she would object, have I? Tosh finds this brooch; I persuade Tosh to deliver it up to me (oh, I'll tell them about our haggling over the sixpence, and all, straight out; they would enjoy the scene, especially Tosh's great friend "Carnoustie"); and I, discovering Mina's name engraven among the thistles, forthwith surrender it to its rightful owner. I am not to be supposed to know that the rightful owner would wish me at Jericho first, am I? I have done the proper thing, and she ought to be grateful to me, not only for extracting her brooch from the maw of Tosh, but for tipping him in return out

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of my own purse. If she has a sense of what is my due, she will recoup me for that sixpence. Well, now,' after a pause, 'shall I?'

Another pause.

'They will all be at luncheon when I go in — that is to say, I need not go in till luncheon time, and be a little late, so that all may be seated at table, when there would be a grand opportunity. I could hand the brooch across the table in full view of all, and I should then have a fair chance of deciding whether or not I have accused unjustly my cousin in the present instance. If she were to accept with thanks and coolness her lost trinket, and if everybody seemed to know it by sight, and expressed nothing but joy in its recovery, I should beg her pardon in my heart, and think twice before I made a mountain out of a molehill a second time. But if, on the other hand, I were confronted by such a face as has been turned on me more than once lately —— '

She paused.

'I have seen Mina grow red and white beneath the simplest observations upon the most far-fetched topics. Last night she was trembling all over because uncle Carnoustie was talking of giving up the home farm, as it does not pay. I heard her mumbling to herself, and suddenly she drew a breath and sprang out of the room, as if someone had been scolding her — as if *she* had had anything to do with the bad lambing year and the losses among the sheep! Then she is always harping upon the Carnoustie pride, and the Carnoustie exclusiveness, as if I can't see the pride and the exclusiveness (as well as the stupidity and ignorance) for myself! She seems to have some rankling spite against her own family; and as long as I was new, and she could let it out to me freely, she was well enough pleased to make me a sort of safety-valve. But ever since I shut her up once or twice — and especially since we had that quarrel about friendship, and marriage, and I said I agreed with them about people keeping to their own rank of life in such things — she has turned against me too. I suspect she has been reading some books with socialistic notions,' quoth Penelope, wisely. 'Papa once brought down some books he said were "socialistic," and I

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remember I looked into them and they were full of dull nonsense — very like the nonsense Mina talks. Now that I think of it, as likely as not she has got her head addled with those sort of books. She was reading something yesterday she would not let me see, and she said "a friend" had lent it her. "A friend?" There's not a human being on the place but Redwood, and the Soutters, and the minister. Mina would have named any one of those, but all she said was "a friend." Now who could that mysterious "friend" be? I meant to think that out before, but I forgot. Never mind; it's all of a piece. There is a long skein to unravel somewhere, and I have not got hold of the least little bit of an end yet.'

But Penelope did not confront her cousin with the brooch in public after all. She thought she would not.

It was easy to argue that the action was perfectly justifiable, indeed, in a measure, necessary. She could only feel that it was base, and Penelope had never done anything base in her life.

She now turned her steps towards the little turret bedchamber adjoining her own, whose open door revealed Mina adjusting her toilet, preparatory to obeying the summons which the gong had just sounded.

'Hi! who's lost this?' cried Penelope, good-humouredly stepping in and holding out the brooch. ('I won't even bid her guess what I've found, poor thing!' she said to herself.) 'Hi! Catch! And don't go dropping your barbaric gewgaws about on the roads another time, or you mayn't always have the luck to have them brought back to you by two such honest vagabonds as Tosh and me.'

'How did you know this was mine?' The tongue of the speaker seemed to cleave to the roof of her mouth. Her voice sounded thick and choked.

'How did I know? I can read, I suppose. And when I see the name "Mina" engraved ——'

'Ah, to be sure — yes. Yes, I did have my name put on. It is rather well done, is it not? Oh, thank you very much, Penelope! I am so glad to have my old brooch again! I — it was — was rather a favourite.'

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Penelope smiled internally: 'All the same, you were not a little taken aback at the first sight of it, my dear. *I* saw.'

'Well, don't leave your favourites on the hill-side again,' said she aloud. 'It is risky. Don't you want to know where it was found, and how?'

'Yes, very much. Did — did you find it?' Mina was stammering painfully. The second luncheon gong sounded.

'We must go down at once, Penelope, or you know mamma will be vexed. Pray be quick, Penelope dear, and tell me about the brooch another time. You — you won't say anything about my silly carelessness downstairs, will you, Penelope?'

'Not if you don't wish it, Mina.'

'I would rather you did not, Penelope.'

It was all very much what Penelope had pictured, only that instead of passion there had been a grey shade of anguish on her cousin's cheek, a look of almost sickened terror in her cousin's eyes when first they fell upon the missing trinket, which made Penelope recognise the value of her own afterthought. 'I would not have had them see her for the world,' she thought, as she hurriedly flew downstairs. 'It was terrible. What it means I do not know, but I will never try to learn at the expense of causing that poor thing such another agony of fright as was painted on her face just now. If she minded me so much, what would she not fear from them? No, my poor cousin, you are safe from me. I will not betray you. I will say nothing; and I will try neither to see, nor to hear, nor to suspect.'

CHAPTER XXI.

LADY CARNOUSTIE'S DILEMMA.

THERE was to be a break in the monotony of daily life at Carnoustie Castle.

'If you are going to have your picnic, or whatever you call it, you had better have it and be done with it,' suddenly announced

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Lord Carnoustie one day. 'You can't have the men to row after this week.'

It was then explained to Penelope, who was supposed to be all eagerness, that every year, about this season, it was the habit of the family to betake themselves to the large boat — so called in distinction to the little one more commonly in use — and be rowed to some point four or five miles off on either side of the shore, where luncheon was prepared among the rocks and caves, whilst the party amused themselves and Joanna sketched.

It was Lady Carnoustie's frolic, and often the only day in the year on which she set foot in a boat, or varied the usual stagnation of her vegetable existence.

Not that this was put into words; oh no! Penelope was merely informed that dear mamma always enjoyed her one day on the water, and that nothing was ever allowed to stand in the way of the expedition. They had not missed this water day for years and years! Louisa exclaimed with animation; and 'I hope we never shall!' subjoined Joanna with an equally exultant glance towards her cousin. Both thought how charmed Penelope would be.

'We always choose a very, very fine day,' said Louisa.

'And we start quite early in the forenoon,' said Joanna.

'We have four men to row, and papa steers,' said Louisa.

'And we have a fire among the rocks to roast the potatoes,' said Joanna.

Penelope looked at them both.

'How nice!'

And it really would have been nice under other conditions, among other people. She was not at all too old or too wise for simple pleasures, might they only have been shared by any people other than the Carnoustie. But the Carnoustie were becoming grievous to her, their weight, their dullness, their prim self-satisfaction intolerable. Her main desire, as the days passed, was to get away from them, and pass her time unthwarted and unquestioned elsewhere; wherefore it was impossible to say more than 'How nice!' when it was still more plainly impossible to say less.

Mina caught her cousin afterwards.

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'You did not manage that particularly well, Penelope,' with curled lip. 'Your "How nice!" lacked fervour. And anyone looking at you to behold your joy, might have been struck by what they beheld in its place.'

Penelope felt a little foolish. Hers was a singularly truthful nature, as Mina Carnoustie knew, wherefore it was unkind thus to pen her into a corner.

'You see I am not very fond of boats,' she murmured.

'Was that it? I thought you had been out a good deal lately in a boat. Have I not seen you and the Glenmore Katie ——'

'Ah, yes; but,' said Penelope eagerly, 'that was under the lee of the shore, as Katie calls it. We never go out in the open. It is the open sea I am afraid of.'

'You don't suppose we are going out to sea to-morrow?'— the morrow had been fixed upon for the expedition. 'What are you thinking of?' said Mina, with a faint smile. 'We are never a dozen yards from land all the time. Mamma would be miserable if we were further off.'

'I'm glad to hear that. I shall no longer be afraid!'

'No, you need no longer be *afraid*'— the speaker paused, then, with another flickering smile, added, 'I like it no better than you do, Penelope; perhaps less.'

Penelope laughed.

'It is rather a — strain sometimes, Mina, is it not?'

'Strain?' Mina's blue eyes shot fire. 'It is such a strain that one wonders how it can be lived through,' she exclaimed with vehemence.

'Oh, I did not mean that!' Penelope drew back a little.

'Perhaps you didn't; I do,' responded her cousin briefly. 'You may be able to bear it, because you are new to the burden; and, besides, it does not press on you as it does on me; but I — I — cannot breathe,' and she turned away and walked off, muttering to herself as she went.

Penelope stood still and looked after her. Then she nodded her head slowly. 'Well, you know,' apostrophising the departing form, 'you yourself, my dear, if one may be allowed to say so, are no very inconsiderable part of the "strain"; you

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cut quite a creditable figure in the sum total of the "burden." I could shuffle along under the rest; but with the addition of you'—and the sage head nodded again. 'What were you up to last night, when you came in from the farm with your white dress all dank with dew and stained with green? You *may* have been at the farm, but you hadn't been *only* at the farm, Mina, my sweetest: that I can swear to. What are they all about not to see there's something going on which won't bear the light? And why don't they clip their fairy's wings a bit? If she has taken to wandering about by herself on moonlight nights, and buying silver brooches off travelling pedlars which she can't pay for (I suppose that was the interpretation of the brooch episode), it is a bad beginning for a young person of Mina's temperament. She'll be joining the gipsy encampment next. By the way, the gipsies have been about a good deal lately; would that in any way account for my fair cousin's pranks? Yes! Am I wanted?' in answer to a call. And as she was wanted, and it was Lady Carnoustie who wanted her, all further ruminating had to be suspended.

When Penelope learned, however, for what purpose her presence was required, she forgave the interruption, and modified her objections to the water party.

Lady Carnoustie was enthroned, as usual, on her sofa, and Louisa was by her; Joanna had probably also been seated within the radius before she had been sent to summon Penelope.

'Now, what have I been and gone and done?' was the latter's first thought. 'Poor little Pen., you are going to get squashed.' But she found she was not to be squashed.

'I sent for you, my dear Penelope,' began Lady Carnoustie in her most gracious accents, 'about a little matter as to which we—my daughters and I—incline to think you are perhaps likely to be better informed than we are ourselves. We think that your opinion would be of value to us. I state the case correctly, I think, Louisa? That is how we feel, is it not, Joanna?'

The sisters assented excitedly.

'Good gracious! What's coming?' thought Penelope.

'You, having lived in London, my dear niece—I must call you niece——'

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'Oh yes, auntie.'

'I was about to say that your London life, Penelope, must have qualified you for — I would observe you must know what to do in a matter of etiquette' — Lady Carnoustie began nervously to shed her fine language as she perceived a shade of impatience even on her own daughters' well-disciplined faces. 'It is regarding a matter of etiquette that I — being old-fashioned and not conversant with modern ideas — am anxious to defer to your judgment. I have lived much out of the world of late, and I am not ashamed to own that while I would be unwilling to offend against the most rigid canons of propriety, I hardly in the present instance know what propriety demands.'

'Come, this is better,' thought Penelope. 'Lady Carnoustie desirous of offending against the canons of propriety! I rather like that.'

Outwardly she merely observed, 'Yes, auntie,' with a gentle interrogatory note and a treacherous twinkle of the eye.

'Ahem!' said Lady Carnoustie, and paused. She could hardly bring herself to open the case, it was one of such extreme delicacy. At length, however, while the faint pink colour mounted to her cheek, she found voice to proceed. 'We are short of rowers for to-morrow,' she said, 'and your uncle — it is his idea entirely — he came in and suggested to me just now that — that perhaps were we to invite our new neighbour, Mr. Redwood ——'

'Why, yes, of course, he'd be just the man!' cried Penelope. ('Come, this isn't to be such a bad old expedition after all,' quoth she, internally.)

'Now, my dear Penelope' — but Lady Carnoustie did not look altogether displeased — 'you are too impulsive. I had not really — really you have not taken all the different points into consideration. What I chiefly wished to inquire of you is — you are used to water parties on the Thames, I understand —— ?'

'Oh, to lots of them, auntie!'

'Is such a thing *done?*' demanded Lady Carnoustie, sitting bolt upright, while Louisa and Joanna also started forward in sympathy. 'Are gentlemen ever invited in such an easy way to take part in the proceedings? Can one say openly to a recent

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acquaintance such as Mr. Redwood, "Will you come and help — to — row the boat?"'

'Lor!' ejaculated Penelope. She had not said 'Lor' for weeks; but in the amazement, bordering on consternation, with which she fathomed the speaker's innocence, the monosyllable escaped. She covered it, however, hastily.

'It is what is done every day, and every hour of the day. We send along to the first man handy whenever we want anyone to take an oar. We never think of using up our gardeners and grooms ——'

'Oh, you don't? Not even when you are a large party?'

'The more the merrier. What are men for but to row? We girls row ourselves when there is not a heavy load; it is only when we are going a big party we need them.'

'And they come? They do not think it a liberty your asking them?'

'If they do, they don't take the liberty to show it, auntie.'

'But now, my dear Penelope, pray be serious. You are smiling, but this is no smiling matter. I should really like to ask Mr. Redwood.'

'Then, my dear auntie, in heaven's name, ask him; he'll bless you for it.'

'You really think so?'

Penelope laughed outright. In her heart, it must be owned, she made use of two very small words which would have had a startling effect had they been breathed aloud; but as they were not, her auditors were quite satisfied with the laugh of confidence, and never knew that this very modern young lady had added, to herself, 'You bet!'

'She certainly inspires one with trust in her judgment,' observed Lady Carnoustie, looking round when the referee had been dismissed; 'it is something to have at hand a person so thoroughly versed in such matters. I shall write to Mr. Redwood immediately. Penelope's sanction is quite sufficient.'

We generally find the sanction of another sufficient when it jumps with our own inclinations.

In her own stupid, purblind fashion Lady Carnoustie had taken hold of the idea presented on the first occasion of Red-

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wood's visiting the castle. Redwood had then, as we knew, singled out the youngest Miss Carnoustie for notice, on two accounts, both due to the same origin; he wished to avoid the young lady whom he suspected of prying upon his humiliation; and he was insensibly attracted by the other whom no one could suppose possessed even any knowledge of it.

After the discovery that all were alike in ignorance, he had not found a downcast countenance necessary to his comfort, and had consequently been more general in his attentions.

But Lady Carnoustie, being slow of wits, and having no reason to suppose there had been any change, or cause for change, in his demeanour, had retained intact the first impressions produced. Satisfied on the score of Mr. Redwood's family and connections, it only needed his being a regular attendant at the parish church to establish him in her ladyship's good opinion, and she was ready to extend her patronage to a solemn, lengthy, ceremonious courtship, as soon as might be.

Indeed, the consciousness of this it was which made the poor woman quite diffident about inviting Redwood to row her boat.

She felt as though the request were at once too flattering and too cool.

To Penelope, indeed, she only owned to the coolness — but to herself and her confidential allies she had turned the matter to the light from another quarter, before summoning her arbitratress; and Louisa and Joanna, with rising sympathy and exhilaration, agreed that if dear mamma approved of Mr. Redwood, and Mr. Redwood were aware of it, all would be smooth sailing.

A note was now despatched to Inverashet.

Redwood, however, was out, and in their present state of mind this was something of a blow. Considering the effort that had been made — for no one had ever before been invited to join the family party on this occasion — it was felt that he ought to have been at home, and to have despatched an acceptance with the utmost haste. In that event only could Lady Carnoustie have been quite at ease in her secret soul. She had done a daring and venturesome deed — risked a bold hazard — and was not even to be altogether reassured by the support of those about her.

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Lord Carnoustie said easily, 'I met Duncan in the road to Inverashet. Were you sending to Redwood about to-morrow?' And on being replied in the affirmative, rejoined, 'He'll be just the man for you. He was in his college boat at Oxford. It's lucky we thought of him.'

Penelope had also said Redwood would be just the man — using the very same words — and had laughed at her aunt's punctiliousness in a way that was quite inspiring. Lady Carnoustie had been actually pleased with the laugh, and pleased with herself for being so! 'No one can say that I am above learning, even from a child,' she thought. 'I deplore Penelope's worldly wisdom, but I permit her to instruct me in it. See how humble and lowly I am! My humility and delicacy, moreover, must reprove Penelope's levity, and make her secretly applaud the very scrupulousness she derides.'

But all the same she wished Redwood had sent an answer. When four o'clock came, and no answer had yet been received, uneasiness had developed into positive anxiety; and she was prepared to blame her husband, her daughters, Penelope and all who had encouraged and, as she now termed it, urged her on to a course so desperate — when the door bell rang, and a few minutes afterwards Mr. Redwood was announced.

Lady Carnoustie's brow cleared; she forgave herself and all concerned; and the young man who had so courteously brought his own response was accorded her best welcome. She was alone, but she was very glad to see him.

Redwood, like the Misses Soutter, never could see that Lady Carnoustie was stiff; certainly not that her blood was poisoned by corrosive festering arrogance. Redwood thought her a very properly mannered dowager — a dowager who merited universal approbation — he felt he had always esteemed such — especially since Mary Duberly's chaperon had once slapped him on the back. Even at the time he had experienced a mild surprise that a woman of Mrs. du Boisgobey's standing should permit herself such freedom, and afterwards he had counted it among his items of torture. He had been slapped, and been seen to be slapped, by eyes innumerable; and the hand which had been the instrument of such jocularity had been the same which,

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within a few days, had attempted to force back upon him the gifts which he had sent his bride.

Upon the occasion of his first visit to Carnoustie Castle he had preferred the stately mistress of the house to anyone in the room, except her youngest daughter.

He was a grave man, and, when under a cloud, a dull one.

So far Redwood has done himself no justice in these pages, but we wish to present him as faithfully to our readers as he presented himself to all new people with whom he came into contact at this period. They would have laughed at his club to hear Charley Redwood called 'dull' — but it is to be feared this was the attribute which would most certainly have been applied to him by strangers during the summer whose events we are recording.

Gravity suited Carnoustie Castle, and what was in Redwood want of spirits and physical languor — for the whole affair had unnerved and unsettled him — was adjudged a part of his normal character, and, as such, highly esteemed by its inmates. When he lent a listless ear to the pompous platitudes of his hostess, agreeing to all she said because it was not worth while to disagree, and assenting with a smile when it was too much trouble to speak, he was little aware of the golden opinions he was winning without an effort. He was not bored, because he wanted nothing better than to be bored. Of all things he coveted he liked this being let alone, unquestioned, and unremarked upon.

It was soothing to find himself entirely left out of the conversation; and that it should turn upon a set of harmless, ignorant working people, upon all the Sandys and Maggies, and Jamies and Jeanies of the village, as it usually did — for other topics were scarce and of small interest to anyone at the castle — seemed to Redwood quaintly primitive and pleasing. How far he could have endured it under other circumstances it boots not here to inquire.

Accordingly, Lady Carnoustie's visitor sat down beside her, prepared to listen to her usual solemn twaddle with his usual good grace, and an odd scene followed.

For Lady Carnoustie could not talk with that great question

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of the boating expedition still pending, and still on her mind; while Redwood, it may here be explained, had never got the note. He had been out on the hills since morning, having taken something to eat in his pocket.

Naturally, therefore, he made no attempt to relieve his companion of her load.

Another woman would have begun without hesitating for a moment, 'I hope you will be able to join us to-morrow?' But, needless to add, so bold a hazard would have sunk Lady Carnoustie for ever in her own estimation. What? Persecute a man for his company? Pester him with her impatience? Never! She could, she hoped, wait in dignified patience till it should please the young man to signify his intentions. Doubtless Mr. Redwood judged it best not to seem too eager; but certainly it was his 'place' — she had now settled Redwood's 'place' in her own mind — to speak first.

When Redwood sat on and on, and yet emitted no word on the all-important subject. she knew not what to think.

Perhaps for the first time in her life her stock of feeble trivialities was felt to be inadequate. She could not keep going for ever, she thought with some exasperation; and really it was so extraordinary of Mr. Redwood.

But before Redwood had time to be still more extraordinary the door opened, and Lord Carnoustie poked in his head.

'Anyone here? Where are the girls? Has Redwood ——'

'Here is Mr. Redwood, Carnoustie,' pointedly.

'Eh? Oh, Redwood; didn't see you. I was just going to ask, Can you come to-morrow? for if not I must get another man. Don't put yourself out — Torquil Macalister will find us a fourth man — but, of course, we should be happy to have you.'

'I don't understand,' said Redwood, looking from one to the other. 'Is it anything you want me to do, Lord Carnoustie?'

'Didn't you get her note?'

And 'You did not then receive my note?' simultaneously demanded the lady.

In a minute all was right. He had received nothing, knew nothing, but now agreed to everything. He would be very happy to go, happy to be of use; had been accustomed to

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rowing all his life, and had never seen the caves on the south side of the island.

His reply to every interrogation was satisfactory.

CHAPTER XXII.

PENELOPE IS LEFT ALONE TO GATHER DRIFTWOOD.

A DEWY August morning melted into a glorious summer day. Not a speck was to be seen in the sky, while the glassy water reflected every object on its surface, and the quivering air along the fences and gateways evidenced the heat in store.

'It will be pleasanter for you than for your oarsmen,' observed Lord Carnoustie, addressing his spouse, to whom he always spoke of the day as 'your day,' and of the party as 'your party'; 'your weather is all right for *you*, anyway.'

'Yes, indeed, dear mamma is most fortunate,' observed Louisa. And dear mamma herself amicably smiled assent.

She was in the best of humours, and Lady Carnoustie could really be very nice so long as the best of humours lasted; indeed, she was at no time a bad-hearted woman, only unreasonably self-satisfied, exacting, and punctilious in small matters.

When all went well, and her petty mind was content to believe that no one was seeking to thwart or overreach her, more especially when taken entirely out of her own beat, she could open out quite wonderfully, and be so grateful, and obliged, and considerate, that you would hardly have known her for the same woman you met under other conditions.

Penelope, who had prepared herself for a day of annoyance, or at best of chastened enjoyment, was agreeably surprised to find in her usually prosy and peevish relation, a meek, bland, responsive companion, who was pleased with everything, and obedient to the slightest suggestion of her conductors.

Her walk down to the shore was a royal progress. She was the centre of attention — everybody's thought; and her com-

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fort and convenience everybody's primary care. This position exactly suited her.

Leaning on her husband's arm, with one daughter carrying her shawl, and another her cushion, with Mina and Penelope running along in front to say she was coming, and her own maid following behind to make sure she was not incommoded by the way, she was — for her — completely happy; and all had the benefit of her serenity.

'My good Dickinson, do not come down in this hot sun; I am quite well taken care of, I assure you. I insist upon it, Dickinson. That little cap upon your head is no protection. Oh well, if you will disobey me, you know' — in high good humour. Then, with a pinch of Carnoustie's arm, 'She is such a good creature; she fancies that she must see me safely off with her own eyes; it is no use my sending her back, she would be quite unhappy!'

Anon it was, 'Dear Louisa, I am quite sorry you should have encumbered yourself with that heavy shawl. There was really no occasion on a day like this. Some of the men could have brought up the plaids from the boat for me to sit on, if you think the caves may be damp. You are coddling your old mother, I fear,' as Louisa delightedly deprecated the idea of being 'encumbered.'

Penelope had the next pæan.

'A pretty figure, has she not, Carnoustie?' with another pinch. Lord Carnoustie did not like his arm being pinched; the fingers were rather thin and bony, and they gripped a tender part; but he would have endured anything rather than ruffle the smooth surface of the day's events; one could never tell what might happen, and he was always glad when the affair was well over. 'Penelope has a very pretty figure, and she trips along lightly,' continued her ladyship, eyeing the pair in front. 'She is not so tall as Mina; but many people are indifferent to height in women. I hope those two will not fatigue themselves with running. They have a long day before them,' with unction.

The run, however, came to an end as she spoke. Redwood was at the gates, and other figures were on the shore, and all was in readiness. No haphazard fashion of getting off was

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permitted on such a day; nothing had been allowed to be forgotten or neglected. The boat had been baled, and carpeted, and overhauled from bow to stern; there was a spare oar, and a couple of spare rowlock pins; the luncheon baskets were stowed away; and Lady Carnoustie herself was the next article required.

Graciously responding to every salutation, Lady Carnoustie was passed on from hand to hand, and eventually landed in her seat of honour. There was nothing for maid or footman to put themselves forward about; no means by which her ladyship's eye might be brought to bear upon their attentiveness. She was pleased to note, however, that they were there; and Duncan and Dickinson felt that they might have their day off with an easy mind.

'Will you be stroke, Redwood?' inquired Lord Carnoustie, taking the helm.

Redwood made no objection.

'Torquil next you; Peter next him; and John next him,' directed Lord Carnoustie; and the men took their places.

In the stern were the three elder ladies; Mina and Penelope being relegated to the bow; and the boat pushed off mirrored in the clear water of the bay.

'What a day Lady Carnoustie has got for her ploy!' exclaimed the elder Miss Soutter to her sister, as from their doorstep the worthy pair watched the departure. 'I declare Lady Carnoustie is always fortunate. What a pretty sight that boat is! And Mr. Redwood's flannel suit — really most picturesque, Marianne!' after a pause. 'Marianne, I'm thinking ——'

'So am I,' said Marianne, blinking in the sun. 'That's just what I'm thinking, too, Jean.'

'Mr. Redwood's a fine young man, Marianne.'

'And not too young, Jean.'

'They're beginning — if one might say so of Lord Carnoustie's daughters — to get on. To be sure, it is no matter; no matter for a family like Lord Carnoustie's whether they get on or ——'

'Or go off,' cackled Marianne, and the two old bodies laughed together.

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'But then there's Mina. Somehow, I do think Mina is not just like her sisters,' continued the elder, thoughtfully after a while. 'If one might say so of such people as the Carnoustes, Louisa and Joanna are cut out for old maids — like ourselves. I could almost doubt their doing so well in the married state, as I have often said; they are cut out for Carnoustie Castle and nowhere else; and whatever they would do without Lady Carnoustie to give them her advice and help, and supply them with all the information they require — Lady Carnoustie being such a very superior person — I really can't think. I always ask Lady Carnoustie's opinion, whenever I get the chance; and she's always most kind in giving it. And I really don't think Louisy and Joanny could get on at all without their mother. Mina is different. When she was a little thing, do you remember how she used to run in here and cry that she wanted other girls to play with? Take my word for it now, Marianne, she wants other girls to play with still.'

'Well, she's got Penelope.'

Jean gave her sister a little push.

'Eh, you're a gomeril! Penelope, indeed! It's not "Penelope" now — but it's the same thing. The lassie frets because she's cooped up like a hen with chickens, or like a hen without chickens — without anything. She's not to do this, and she's not to do that, and what *is* she to do? She has no fancy for puddling in and out among the poor folks, small blame to her! I'm not so fond of it myself, poor things! It isn't everybody that likes them and their dirt. Well, then, she's not musical like Louisy, nor artistic like Joanny, though between ourselves I do think those drawings of Joanny's are dreadful queer-coloured, and not just so like the places she says they are as they might be. The one thing Mina likes is books; and that's most unfortunate, for Lady Carnoustie is *that* particular that, according to her, there's scarcely a book a lassie can read in their library. Of course a person like Lady Carnoustie must know best; still, I will say I think it's a pity Mina should come to our house for books; and sometimes, Marianne, do you know, I misdoubt I ought hardly to give them to her. But then, poor lamb! she is six-and-twenty years of age; and supposing she had been

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married half-a-dozen years syne, which you know she might have been' — (in strict confidence the Misses Soutter had been informed of the one love affair which had had such an ephemeral existence and such an abrupt termination), — 'by this time she might have had a family of her own,' concluded Miss Jean, impressively.

'Time enough yet,' responded Marianne, whose eyes were still fixed upon the boat which was slowly rounding the point of the bay. 'If you think Mina wants a husband ——'

'Oh fie! Wants a husband indeed!'

'That's what you mean, neither more nor less; and what I say is, here's Mr. Redwood for her.'

'Unless he takes up with Penelope.'

As she spoke she turned round and looked at her sister fixedly. Marianne had again expressed her thoughts, but did Marianne share the fear, the lurking apprehension of her own breast? For many days past she had been putting the question to herself, which would she herself choose, were she a young man, unmarried and free to select a wife? Loyalty to the Carnoustie race demanded that she should at once scout the idea of any danger from a rival where one of them was concerned, but somehow she could not bring herself to disdain Penelope's charms. Penelope was no fairer, no prettier than her cousin — she even lacked Mina's languid grace of movement; but, on the other hand, the life that sparkled in her eye, the joyous animation of her voice, her very expressions, piquant and suggestive, redolent of another sphere — did they not carry with them their own irresistible witchery, and might not Redwood be more susceptible to such than to stereotyped attractions?

'I doubt I know which I would have,' cogitated poor Miss Jean ruefully.

Her old heart went out to the youth of Penelope. Penelope was so young, yet so clever! Had she dared to think as much of a Carnoustie, she would have said that her rival, if rival Mina were, was childish without being childlike.

Nevertheless, she comforted herself with the thought that she was not Redwood — not a man — and that men, especially when suitors, often went 'clean contrairy' to the rest of the world.

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Redwood had certainly so far evinced no sense of appreciating the young English stranger at a higher rate than her relations; and it was but reasonable to hope he had not perceived the difference.

And, at any rate, Lady Carnoustie had invited Redwood to her own pleasure party.

Within the memory of the factor's sisters, no one not resident for the time being within the castle precincts had ever been permitted to take part in that august festivity, and they rightly discerned in the present departure from the order of things a certain significance.

To be sure, the year's tenant of Inverashet had been down considerably earlier in the season than was at all usual; and this was known to be felt a compliment by Lord Carnoustie and his family. They did not like to hear that Inverashet was only to be inhabited a few days before the 'Twelfth.' 'Just as if there were nothing but shooting on the island!' they would say to each other when this was the case. Still, Mr. Redwood had had no reason to complain of any lack of hospitality in the Misses Soutter's eyes. He had dined about once a fortnight at the castle, a great condescension on the part of the Carnoustie towards a stranger of whose pedigree they knew next to nothing (there was a rumoured Sir Henry Redwood somewhere in the background, but even of that personage Lord Carnoustie could only affirm he had 'heard'); so that really the Carnoustie had done their part, and were doing it, by the young man; and he could never have expected to be included in the family picnic.

That he had not been asked on the spur of the moment, all who knew anything about the Carnoustie would be very certain.

Had he then shown any predilection for one of the young ladies? And if so, did the parents approve? Or, did they not perceive?

This was the problem which puzzled the worthy sisters, and which neither the one nor the other, nor yet John, to whom it was presently submitted, could answer.

Meantime the big boat thumped along.

Redwood, whose rowing had chiefly been done in Eton and Oxford skiffs, was at first slightly thrown out by the heavy oar

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and lumbering style it entailed, but soon becoming used to his work, showed himself a master hand.

And he enjoyed the pull.

It was hard work, no doubt, and he was not in first-rate condition; but the scenery was beautiful, the weather delightful, and the company rather to his mind than otherwise.

They were not lively people, but he did not want lively people. Lord Carnoustie was a fine-looking old greybeard, and the little talks in which every now and then he indulged with his men showed him 'a good sort.' He made jokes with Peter, and John, and Torquil Macalister, and the three answered readily, and laughed cheerfully: Redwood could see that they understood their landlord, and he them.

Lady Carnoustie was still in a state of beaming quiescence, and the younger ladies followed her lead. No one was noisy or demonstrative. Redwood had once gone on the river with Miss Duberly and a party, and remembered that they had all — including himself — been fairly boisterous. He hated the recollection which rose before him as the quiet boat moved on its course through the placid water, and the only sounds that broke the measured thud of the oars were subdued voices, in whose every accent gentle nurture was discernible, or the responses of the humbler crew, with whose jargon there yet intermingled no strain of coarseness or vulgarity.

It was all pleasant, all harmonious.

Penelope's 'Oh, how beautiful — how beautiful!' from the bow, was but the spontaneous expression of a glad young heart unable to contain itself.

Redwood smiled upon Penelope as he handed her out, when the time for disembarking arrived. He had given over classing her with Mary Duberly long before this, and established her in his mind within her own niche of the Carnoustie family. She was a Carnoustie, and a nice cheery little Carnoustie — quite harmless and innocent, yet sharp enough — quite 'up to date' and simple withal.

She wanted a fire? All right; he would help to make a fire.

He was ready to do anything. Was any other service required of him?

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Not just then. The men were carrying up the baskets, and the ladies would arrange the luncheon. Mina was going for water to the mountain spring — 'Oh, let me!' cried Redwood, not sorry to loosen his limbs, which were stiff from the long row; 'I'll fetch the water,' forgetting that he had the moment before promised to make the fire.

As a fact he had no choice which he did; he did not care one jot; either would give him the kind of exercise he wanted, and either would afford opportunity for the pipe he longed for. No one would object to his smoking in the open air.

But Penelope felt a strange sharp pang at her heart.

Since when was it that anything said or done by this careless stranger had had the power thus to move her? She had no idea. She had never before experienced the like.

There they were, the two tall figures, springing away over the moss hags, swinging the little pail between them — and there was she left alone to gather her sticks.

Mechanically she went on gathering them. What in the world had come to her? Jealous of Mina? And jealous because of Redwood? What was either Redwood or Mina to her? She had gaily bantered her cousin on the subject, and seriously considered that such an alliance would be the very best thing that could happen, could it by any means be brought to pass. When Mina had coldly negatived the idea, or turned it aside, Penelope had felt quite impatient. It was not likely anything could ever be done for a girl who would do nothing for herself; who when she saw a chance would not profit by it.

Of late the two had talked frequently of Redwood. Their subjects of conversation were limited, and every occasion which brought him to the castle showed him to greater advantage than before. Certainly he had at first been underrated. He was not the unmovable, unimpressionable man he had been on the surface. There were gleams about his face, notes in his voice; he let fall curious items, made allusions; they perceived — or Penelope did — that they had another personality to reckon with than they had erst supposed.

Penelope had been more than pleased that Redwood should join the water party.

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But now — now she must gather her sticks by herself. Redwood had indeed smiled upon her and offered to help her, but he had gone off with her cousin the minute after.

All at once she wanted no fire, and secretly grudged the labour of collecting driftwood beneath a blazing sun.

The shore was as hot where she was as on the hill-side. It was quite as weary work bending her back over her quest as carrying a pail to the upland for water. Why had Lady Carnoustie drawn Redwood's attention to her daughter's mission? Mina wanted no assistance, and was contentedly slipping away by herself, unperceived by all the rest; had she been presently sighted by Redwood he would doubtless have presumed her to be strolling about for the sake of a little refreshing exercise after the long row, during which she had had to sit still. Lady Carnoustie's awkwardness had forced him to be chivalrous.

Lady Carnoustie was now on her way to a cool retreat beneath the rocks, in search of shelter from the burning sun; Lord Carnoustie remained tranquilly in charge of the boat; while the others, in a group, were toiling over the shore with the various items towards the spot selected for the encampment; and there was no one — as she thought — near Penelope.

She was therefore not a little surprised and somewhat startled, to hear on a sudden a violent exclamation of anger — in truth, it was a good round oath, though unintelligible, being in a strange language — within a few yards of where she stood dejectedly regarding the pair upon the slope above; and, not wishing to run across an irate islander, whosoever he might be, or against whomsoever his wrath might be directed, was turning to hasten away, when, to her surprise, Lord Carnoustie's own favourite retainer, Torquil Macalister, issued from the spot.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

'LET EVERY HERRING HANG BY ITS AIN TAIL!'

'ONLY Torquil!' was Penelope's first thought, and her steps instantly slackened in obedience to it.

But the next minute she did not feel inclined to say 'only Torquil.' Torquil had rushed past her, oblivious of her presence, and apparently absorbed in his own emotions. She had caught a full glimpse of his bronzed face distorted with passion, and heard him again give utterance to a deep objurgation, whose object or objects it was not difficult to determine. His eye was directed towards the heather brae. On the brae there were only two people.

Penelope shrank into herself.

For a few minutes she felt literally too much startled to think. She almost doubted the evidence of her own eyes and ears; it seemed such a strange, inexplicable thing, that this simple mountaineer should be thus moved by a sight which, however depressing to herself, could not be supposed to have any interest for him.

Presently, however, she began as usual to take counsel with herself in her own tongue, which was not the tongue approved in her present home.

'What the dickens is it to *you*, Greek Face? We all know what a fine gentleman you are, and how you will wear as many shirts a week as your master, and read poetry lying on the moor, and all the rest of it; but, good gracious, man! that needn't make you swear at Mr. Redwood behind his back! You are a mighty fine fellow, and your airs and graces are quite in keeping. I admire you on the moor, my "stag of ten," as Carnoustie calls you but I did not admire you, particularly in the boat, when you were rather cheeky about Mr. Redwood's rowing; and I did not admire you at all, quite the contrary, just now, when you scowled and growled in your barbarous dialect, and shook your untutored fist at him, thinking no one

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saw you. Your head's turned, that's what it is, Apollo. You poor fool, can't you see that it isn't *looks* which will send you up the ladder of life?' continued she, contemptuously. Then, after a pause, 'It was really very impertinent, disgracefully impertinent! These Carnousties encourage impertinence by their very pride and egotism. They won't know anyone out of their own world, and their world consists of themselves and their creatures; naturally the creatures get to be as self-important as their betters. Even Tosh talks about "ain o' oorsels" to them; and they all gravely listen. It does not matter for poor silly Tosh; but it is a different thing when Torquil Macalister is encouraged to criticise Mr. Redwood's handling of the oar, and exhibit his superior knowledge before an admiring audience. Here is consequence No. 1. He has the insolence to put himself on a level with one of our guests; and, No. 2, to shake his fist at him. How horrid a man of that class looks when he is in a rage!' with a little uneasy shrug of her shoulders. 'I suppose this Torquil likes to play first fiddle, and be noticed by the gentry, and all that; some of these outdoor servants do. And Mina encourages him, I know she does. I told her the other day I thought she spoke to Torquil Macalister too much on terms of equality, and she would not take the hint; but if she had seen this "poor harmless shepherd," as she called him, just now, I fancy she would alter her tune.'

Presently it was 'There they come with their pail! It is as well it has a lid; they would never carry it to the caves without spilling the half, if they had taken an open can. There goes Torquil Macalister to humbly offer his services. Nay, Torquil, they won't give it up — oh, they have!' witnessing the transference. 'That's as well," continued Penelope, musing; 'just as well. It may soothe this injured native's ruffled feelings, and it leaves someone else free to come this way — and' — her cheek glowed — 'he is looking this way. Perhaps — perhaps he is coming.'

The next moment she was gathering sticks vigorously.

Redwood had suggested that, as Miss Carnoustie no longer needed him, he might perhaps be of use to her cousin. From the side of the mountain spring whence the water had been

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drawn, his eye had fallen on Penelope, patiently, as he thought, pursuing her self-imposed task; and he had recollected all at once his faithless offer of assistance.

He would now make up for it, if agreeable to his companion.

Oh yes, very agreeable; Mina would be only too glad. Poor Penelope! She would never by herself collect enough driftwood to make a fire. The drift did not come that way. A little further back, where the promontory jutted out, were Penelope to look, she would find plenty of spars and odd pieces of wood, swept up by the ocean waves; and there was abundance of time to gather a good bundle, as they did not lunch till half-past one. Dear mamma liked to rest awhile first.

All of this Redwood took to mean that he was to go and explore the promontory, as well as to aid Penelope. How different was this Mina Carnoustie from most of the girls he had hitherto known! She evinced not the slightest desire to attach him to her side; on the contrary, she almost sent him away; and there was no mistaking the resolution with which she declined his 'You won't come yourself?'

At the moment he made it the water-pail got nearly dashed over against an edge of rock.

'Look out!' cried Redwood, sharply. 'You'll have that pail upset if you don't take care,' he added, annoyed with the carelessness which had threatened another journey to the spring.

'Others than I had best have a care,' retorted Torquil Macalister in his native language; and he set his teeth, and an ugly light flashed from his eyes with the words.

Redwood, however, perceived nothing.

'What does he say?' demanded he of Miss Carnoustie, laughing. 'Do you understand that wild lingo?'

To his amazement she seized his arm and held him back, whilst he caught an apprehensive glance directed towards the stalwart Highlander.

'He is affronted because you called out to him like that,' murmured she. 'Torquil is not accustomed to being ordered about. He will do anything if he is only asked to do it.'

'Oh that's it! I shall be careful only to "ask" him another time. I did not know he was so sensitive.'

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'Don't laugh,' said Mina in the same timid undertone; 'he will hear you laughing.'

'Perhaps I had better take myself out of his way? It might be dangerous to provoke his susceptible nervous system.'

He was in jest, but she was quite serious.

'Yes, do; do go. It really would be better. He will be all right when you come back. Already something has put him out to-day. I knew that in the boat. But I will speak to him.'

'And soothe his *amour propre*,' said Redwood lightly. 'I'll go, then,' and he sprang away, and was soon by Penelope's side.

'Torquil,' said Mina Carnoustie, softly, 'Torquil.'

No one else ever heard Mina speak in such tones as now fell from her lips.

When Penelope and her companion next looked that way the heights were empty, but the two were not at the caves. It was a long time before they entered the caves.

The others, however, were still later, and on any occasion but the present Lady Carnoustie would have been chillingly repellent. To-day, however, she had nothing but a gay reprimand for the three recusants (for Mina joined Redwood and Penelope outside, and no one perceived that she had not been with them all along), and their exertions were applauded as they laid at the feet of their liege lady the pile of driftwood for the fire to be kindled presently. She had never before had a fire at her picnic, and gratefully allowed that it would be a charming innovation to have a cup of tea before starting on the return row.

She then bade them notice what an admirable place had been selected for the repast, and how elegantly it had been set out.

Everybody had been so clever, so willing!

The great cool rocks above formed a delightful protection from the sun, while yet not intercepting the view of the sea and the faint blue hills beyond.

'Is it not a beautiful view, my dear Penelope?' concluded the speaker in the plenitude of her satisfaction.

She had appealed to the right person. Penelope was experiencing a renewal of her first enthusiasm on the subject, and the radiance of the sunlit sky and shining ocean was reflected in her glowing countenance as she signified her joyous assent.

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Half an hour before she could not have so responded, but now every feeling of discontent had vanished from her breast. She had forgiven Redwood and forgotten Torquil Macalister, and the present moment was to her all that heart could wish.

As Mina also seemed exhilarated beyond her wont, and the rest were proportionately in good-humour, the repast was the gayest Penelope had ever partaken of in company with her new-found relations.

It was more than cheerful, it was merry. There was quite a clatter of dishes and a chinking of glass. Brisk demands flew from lip to lip. Everybody wanted everything at once.

Even Lord Carnoustie, foreseeing a continuance of the settled weather, and in consequence a lucky 'Twelfth' — now close at hand — was in spirits to eat and drink more heartily than was his wont at that hour, and drew corks and cut up pies with a joviality that elicited 'Oh, papa!' constantly from the lips of the tittering and delighted Louisa and Joanna.

A glass of wine was upset into Lady Carnoustie's lap.

Lady Carnoustie begged no one would be discomposed by such a mere trifle. Her good Dickinson had taken the precaution of making her wear an old gown, a gown for which nothing signified, and the stain was not of the slightest consequence.

When such an appalling accident was declared to be not of the slightest consequence, no subsequent disaster or hardship could be thought of for a moment.

When the time for Penelope's tea-making came, for instance, no small exertions and perseverance were required to get that fire to burn. The smoke was frightful — stinging, blinding smoke. Yet Penelope watched and tended and blew, till her eyes were dim and her cheeks blackened in the process, insisting upon it that her fire would reward them all at last.

The kettle toppled over, and the water poured from its mouth; but Redwood flew up the hillside and was back with more before the fire was properly put together again.

There were no tea-spoons, but what did they want with tea-spoons?

And then again Lady Carnoustie came to the front and said how much she enjoyed her tea, and thanked Penelope for the

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happy thought. Penelope smiled brightly back, standing in the middle of her smoke, teapot in hand.

'You are really a spirit of the mist, my dear Penelope,' was the next rejoinder. 'Your wand has produced this pleasant part of the entertainment, but you yourself remain enshrined in mystery,' and Lady Carnoustie laughed merrily at her simple pun.

Penelope thought that she should never be quite so hard upon Lady Carnoustie after this day.

How often she looked back upon it, how many times in her mind's eye she beheld the little group seated upon the sandy cavern floor, how tenderly she sometimes sighed over the scene in the retrospect, none ever knew; enough to say that it was the last time for many and many a day that she was to look into the faces around without fearing and trembling for what they might read in her own.

It was now five o'clock.

The afternoon had passed swiftly away, each one following her own bent, and none interfering with that of another. Louisa had elected to wash and pack the *débris;* Joanna had sallied forth with her colour-box and sketching block; Mina had offered to find a nook for her mother further along the beach, and to remain with her there; and Lord Carnoustie, Redwood, and Penelope had rambled about.

Redwood had been both cheerful and useful. Penelope had industriously gathered a posy of wild honeysuckle, heather, rowan-berries, and crimson hips and haws with which the braes were teeming, and his knife had been ready and his eye as keen as her own in detecting new and ornamental additions. When she scratched her hand on a rough ledge of rock down which she was sliding in pursuit of sprawling bramble blossoms, he had been sympathetic and commiserative, and had insisted on himself binding the wound, with a jest over the tiny pocket-handkerchief she drew forth for the purpose. He had smiled at the bandage, but it had been an indulgent smile. From first to last he had not seemed to miss Mina — and that was all Penelope wanted. That he should be happy with her, contented in her society, was the utmost she cared about.

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Yet that she did care to this extent was certain. She knew it at any rate afterwards.

And then, as we have said, they all came back to the cool shelter of the cave for tea.

By half-past five it was time to be thinking of the return journey.

'Heigho!' said Lord Carnoustie, rising and stretching himself vigorously. 'Well, this has really been a very pleasant day. You could not have had a better day if you had made it on purpose. We have hit the tides, too — at least, we have jock-eyed them, for the men say it does not matter in the least the tide's being out down there where they have the boat now. We can get down to her quite easily. Well, we had better be going,' and he set off, leading the way, with his wife anew attached to his arm. The rest followed, and the homeward pull was achieved without any incident worthy of mention.

Redwood could not remain to dinner, as he was expecting a friend to arrive by the evening steamer. By this time he was so far improved in health and spirits that he had invited one of his former companions to shoot with him, and found himself looking forward to Felix Merriman's company with something even of anticipation. He would tell Felix that he was 'all right;' that he liked the place and the people; that there was but one family in the neighbourhood, but that they could not be improved upon; that, in short, the whole thing suited him; and, finally, he would march Merriman over to Carnoustie Castle and enjoy his astonishment over its impressive grandeur.

'He won't expect anything like it,' Redwood had been chuckling to himself once, when Penelope saw him smiling, and wondered what he was smiling at. He was still living his own life, and chiefly occupied with his own back draughts of thought.

Accordingly he bade 'Farewell' with thanks and pleasant speeches at the castle gates; and set off in a dog-cart which was in waiting, so as to be at Inverashet, or rather at the bottom of the glen, by the time the steamboat hove in sight; and the rest of the party wended their way up the avenue.

As a concession to fatigue they dined at once in their morning dress, after which the elder ladies almost immediately retired

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to their rooms. It was still early, however, and Lord Carnoustie, who, on the picnic day, did everything he did *not* do at other times, having stepped outside for a round of the farm offices in the cool of the evening, Penelope and Mina took each other into confidence on the subject.

'I am going out too,' whispered the former, as soon as whispering was safe. 'I am not going to miss such a chance. What do you say? You are not going off to your bed?'

Mina looked undecided.

'Oh then, do!' Penelope let her go. 'Only, don't expect me. It is broad daylight.'

'It is daylight nearly all night long, at present.'

'But it is only nine o'clock. I can't go to bed at nine o'clock.'

'One needn't go to *bed*.'

'Anyhow, you don't want to come with me,' said Penelope, laughing. 'All right. "Let every herring hang by its ain tail," as Ailsie says. You do what you like, and I'll do what I like. They won't shut up for another hour or so, I suppose?'

'Oh no, papa will be out till ten. Besides, the doors are never locked till ten. I can tell them you are out, if you like. But, Penelope, you won't go far at this hour?'

'Bless you, no! I'll be in the grounds somewhere, or on the shore. I'll keep close to the lodge if I am on the shore. Only I can't keep indoors to-night, I feel so restless. There's no harm in my going, is there?' turning round as she was about to depart.

Mina smiled reassuringly. 'Oh dear, no! I made that all right years ago. I had rather a battle for it, but in the end I conquered. So long as you keep to your own grounds, or to the shore between us and Mr. Soutter's house, you may go alone at any hour of the day. *I* do, and what I do you may do. Mamma understands that. Good night.'

They kissed each other, and Penelope turned away.

She was not sorry that Mina let her go by herself. Mina had been unusually kind and cousinly throughout the day, and she had felt in a manner bound to invite her to the evening ramble, it being tacitly understood that the two paired off, when

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left to their own resources; but she had several interesting items to think over which would hardly have done to talk over.

There was Mina herself, for instance, and Redwood. Redwood had shown himself almost indifferent to her cousin, and had been both kind and pleasant towards herself, not only all day, but for several previous days.

Certainly he had relapsed, or rather he had caught himself up as it were, when essaying to be one of the messengers to the mountain spring; but then again he had broken off from his companion in order to assist her own quest, and this quest he had prolonged and appeared to enjoy. He had been pertinacious in demanding that the promontory should be explored. Miss Carnoustie had said the drift settled upon it, and the drift was what they were in search of. Penelope, although nothing loth on her own account, had feared to bring down on both the reproach of keeping others waiting, an offence she had learned to correct at Carnoustie Castle; but Redwood had not seemed to think anything of this.

'Nobody is particular at a picnic,' he said. 'And we were told to go to the promontory; so to the promontory we must go. We must obey orders.'

It had ended in their having a very pleasant time on the promontory, and Mina had joined them, as we know, outside the cavern entrance. If the latter move on Mina's part had been made with a view to averting her mother's possible displeasure over their unpunctuality, it was good-natured of Mina.

On the other hand, why had Mina suggested and enjoined the unpunctuality?

'I am growing horribly suspicious,' said Penelope, angrily shaking her head at herself. 'I never can allow that poor Mina does anything straight. It has got into me, somehow, that she is a crooked piece of goods, and I look out for the crookedness in every quarter. Why should she not wish Mr. Redwood to take me for a stroll? She knows I like Mr. Redwood; I have said so over and over again. There is no reason why I shouldn't say it. His grave face, over which there just steals the shadow of a smile when I bang at him with my silly nonsense, is more stimulating than if he tried with all his might to

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be funny back. I don't like funny men. I like to be funny myself, and I like Mr. Redwood's air of saying "You are a goose, but I can't help laughing." That's what suits Penelope very well. He rather likes me now — I know he does; and, dispassionately speaking, I am much more in his line than that sentimental Mina. What could they do but mope and sigh in each other's company if she took up with him? Whereas I would keep him merry, and he would have enough ado to keep me in order. That would be tit for tat. We should do very well — *very* well together. How amused papa would be to be met with the announcement that I had found — my fate! No great match, even if he comes in for the baronetcy, which I doubt his doing. And not rich; though that's nothing, since I shall have plenty. Oh, papa would not object; papa would be very well pleased, I dare say.

'But what nonsense I am talking!' Suddenly Penelope broke into one of her shrill, ringing laughs. 'What ridiculous, absurd, preposterous folly and rubbish! Penelope, you ought to be ashamed of yourself! You know next to nothing about this man. You don't even know that he ever gives you a thought, and, worse than that, you don't know that if he did you would give him one — a serious one — in return; and yet you look on ahead at such a pace that you have got to papa's "Bless my soul! You artful monkey!" in your dreams already. Your dreams, indeed! It is this insinuating, seducing, romantic spot which is to blame. It is these craggy mountain heights, these solemn, long-drawn shadows, the peace, the stillness, that sharp-edged croak of the landrail in the cornfields behind — it is something in the atmosphere which burns into the soul, and eats away all common-sense and every proper feeling.'

Then she paused.

'Besides, we are a lazy lot, and "Satan finds some mischief still," for me as well as for Mina. What *does* that girl do with herself? I should not wonder a bit now, if she never went to bed at all, but just waited till I was out of the way to steal up the burnside by herself. Suppose I go up and catch her? It would be rather a joke. I'll tease her life out if she has played me such a trick!' and with girlish delight in the manœuvre, of

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which she never afterwards thought without a shudder, Penelope suddenly quickened her steps — she was close to the house — and, turning off at right angles, darted down the slope into the tangles of the glen below.

It was darker there than above, and somewhat daunted by the shade of the over-arching boughs, she paused before traversing the little stony path by the side of the burn, which opened out on to the moor.

'She would hardly go up there by herself at this time of night,' quoth Penelope, coming to a standstill. 'It would be too mad. If she did go, she is back again. I don't like the look of this ghostly glen in the twilight. No, I'll not go ferreting after Mina to-night. I'll put it off, like Tony Lumpkin's education, to another opportunity,' turning round to retrace her steps.

A rustle in the brake below caught her attention.

'Someone is there anyhow,' murmured she, her heart beating a little. 'I'd best get home. Can one of the deer have got loose from the park? I don't like loose deer. They may be as safe as Uncle Carnoustie says they are in August; but they have horns, and creatures with horns are never to be trusted.

'There it is again!' listening.

A murmur of voices stole towards her on the balmy air.

'Oho! That's better!' Penelope felt relieved. 'Some of the maids sweethearting, poor things! How they must enjoy it! I should like it myself in a place like this. There they are!' her eye catching the expected pair of figures emerging from the ferny brake. 'I won't meet them — it would be unkind,' quickly and easily secreting herself in the gloom of some thick bushes above the path. 'And I will never tell; for, after all, maids must have their sweethearts as well as other people; and the girl is going home now, and will be in by ten o'clock. Hark! there is the stable clock chiming a quarter to ten now. Get on, you Maggie, or Jenny, or whoever you are; get on, can't you now? Cut short your leave-taking, and say "Good-bye" smartly, for I must get in by ten myself, and I shall have to wait till you and your swain are clear off the field.'

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The two figures approached.

Closer and closer they came to where Penelope crouched in the bushes, the man's arm round the woman's waist, her head upon his shoulder.

It might have been a simple, touching attitude; there was nothing unpleasing to the eye in the fondness of a pair of rustic lovers, nothing jarring to the ear in their tender murmurings; what was it, then, which all on a sudden caused the unseen beholder to start and quiver from head to foot — to pant forth a name, with gasping breath and rushing pulses, and wild, throbbing eyeballs?

What was the name that burst from Penelope's lips?

CHAPTER XXIV.

'A PINK GINGHAM FROCK.'

SHE had found out her cousin's secret at last.

Others besides the Israelitish monarch of old have screamed in affright before the spectre conjured up at their own desire, and the first impulse of the appalled Penelope was to fall upon the earth for very shame and horror.

What had she seen? A sight to haunt her to her dying day.

Whom? A noble maiden of ancient lineage, in whose veins flowed the blood of a long line of ancestors, whose thoughts and imaginings had been fed from infancy with proud traditions of the past and dreams of the future, yielding a response to the presumptuous aspirations of a low-born menial!

Her cousin Mina — Mina Carnoustie — Mina on whom the fondest hopes were placed, and the most tender affections lavished!

On this point Penelope had never been misled. She had always seen that coldness and reserve meant nothing in Mina's case, that she was the cherished object of the stately home, its pride, its ornament.

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That Mina should so fall from her high estate! The shock was stunning, bewildering. Again and again Penelope caught herself saying, 'It cannot be — it *cannot* be.' She must have been mistaken; a hideous vision had passed before her and blinded her sight.

But back upon her memory there swept a flood of terrible recollections. First one thing and then another threw themselves, as it were, before her eyes, and demanded her remembrance.

Mina's secrecy — her double-dealing — her agitation over trifles — her concealment of apparently simple matters — the gradual withdrawal of her confidence and intercourse — the episode of the silver brooch: all pointed the one way, and all with one wild burst of realisation overwhelmed the mind.

Penelope put her hands before her eyes.

'I am dreaming — dreaming,' she muttered; but, alas! she knew it was no dream.

In the dark she heard her own sobbing, loud and regardless.

The pair had passed on, passed down the little path, and were soon lost to view.

'Oh, I *know* I was mistaken!' cried Penelope, aloud. 'I know it! I know it! I could not see clearly. Mina is in her own room, high up among those castle turrets. She is not here, all alone, at this late hour; she has not stolen out to meet a——' She shuddered from head to foot.

The dusk descended suddenly. She heard a quick step back, and shrank again behind her bushy screen. It was Torquil Macalister returning to his mountain solitudes, where at this season he often passed the night in some rude bothy or temporary shelter.

He had parted from his companion. He looked joyous and contented — a different man from the sullen savage who had already once to-day crossed the path of an unseen spectator.

This then was the solution of his anger against Redwood. He had seen in Redwood a rival, and one at advantage. It was more than his passionate spirit could brook, until assured that of Redwood he need have no fears.

Penelope now called to mind how Torquil had dashed up the hill side to meet the water carriers, and how almost immediately

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afterwards Redwood had quitted the party, leaving him and Mina together.

She also recollected that the bronzed countenance of the Highlander had worn an air of covert exultation, while he carried his head high, and swung his oar as though in the very bravado of strength and skill, on the homeward journey. She had noted at the time Torquil's altered demeanour; but deeming it due to some trifle of little consequence — the commendation of his master, or the gracious acknowledgment of his mistress, or possibly the good meal provided for the rowers in their own nook on the sands — had only fancied the shepherd a shade less disagreeable when in good humour than in bad. His handsome face could not cover the repulsive expression of his eye and brow, whether it were of insolent self-esteem or malignity.

Alas! all was now explained!

And Mina? Had she appointed then this tryst? And was it for this she had evaded Penelope, and feigned weariness? Too surely.

That was, supposing it were Mina; but might it not even yet be some other than her cousin?

With the thought Penelope staggered to her feet.

She would not condemn without proof — absolute proof — proof positive. The clothes, the little shawl in which the head was enveloped, the movements, the murmurs, all indeed were Mina's; but she cried out in the aching solicitude of her heart that Mina's face she had not seen; and might it not be possible — barely possible — that all the rest might be accounted for?

Mina asleep in bed, might not her own little maid, a girl about the height of her mistress, have taken leave to borrow the pretty dress and drapery; and might not Penelope, misled by these wrappings, have fitted in the rest from her own imaginings?

She would know the truth, and soon.

The next minute saw her hastening down the bank, stumbling in the uncertain light against this and that projection, but heedless of every obstacle, hurrying along in the direction of the castle.

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'Hi! Penelope, is that you?' called a voice from behind.

It was Lord Carnoustie returning from his round.

'Why did you not come along with me if you wanted a turn?' said he, good-humouredly. 'I thought you were off to bed, the whole set of ye. Then I see Mina flying in just now, and here are you flying after her.'

'Did Mina go in just now, uncle?' Penelope's heart sickened.

'Aye, not five minutes ago. We have all been our own ways, then. She was not with you?'

'No, uncle,' faintly.

'And why did neither of you come with me? I was just round by the farm and stables, taking a look at everything. It would have amused you to come.'

'I — I was on the shore.'

'On the shore? Why, you were coming from the hill!'

'I went there for a few minutes, to see if Mina ——' She could not go on.

'Oh, you were looking after her? Set your mind at rest then. She's in. She ran out of the wood before I could get up to it; but I saw her plainly enough.'

'Which door did she go in by, uncle?'

'Which door? This door' — they were entering by a garden entrance, only used by the family. 'She crossed the bridge, just as you have done,' continued Lord Carnoustie, 'and came straight up here. I thought you must have been together.'

'We have — missed — each other.' If the voice of the speaker were husky and strained, no one noticed it but herself. 'I will go and say "Good-night" to Mina. Good-night, uncle,' and Penelope slowly turned away.

The worst was being confirmed by his unsuspecting testimony.

Still she resolutely ascended the staircase leading to her cousin's room, and, not allowing herself time to think, tapped at the door. Oh, if Mina were only in bed — only in bed! And if the pink gingham dress were abstracted — only abstracted!

Penelope had a curious feeling as if that amount of evidence would be all-sufficient to outweigh the rest, that she would assure herself she had no need to press for more. She would be

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content. To demand further explanation would be unnecessarily exacting.

No one answered her first feeble summons, nor was there a sound audible from within. She snatched at this.

'She is in bed — she is asleep!' cried Hope in her breast; but the next moment Fear dashed the intruder aside. A second low tap at the door elicited a distinct rustling sound within the chamber, and the door was suddenly opened, in place of the applicant's being invited to enter.

'Penelope? Oh, what do you want?' said Mina, in some surprise. 'Have you been here long? I did not hear you till now.'

No confusion in her eye, no tremor in her voice. Could she have acted the part before?

One glance had destroyed the last ray of hope in Penelope's bosom. Not only had Mina the alert step and voice, the vivacity impossible to connect with drowsiness, but she wore the gingham dress, and a bunch of rowan-berries had been added since the girls parted.

Seeing that on these Penelope's eyes fell, Mina with a hasty movement drew them out and tossed them aside.

'I ought to have been getting ready for virtuous repose, instead of dressing up at this hour, ought I not?' She laughed carelessly. 'But the truth is I could not resist seeing whether scarlet rowans could be worn with this pink frock or not. You know I am so fond of wearing rowans; but red and pink do not go well together, I am afraid. What do you think?' She lifted the little spray again, and held it against the bosom of her frock.

'Not very well.' Penelope's rejoinder was almost inaudible; she was struggling against betrayal.

'No, they don't,' said Mina, coolly. 'I must condemn them to the water-glass;' and she occupied herself in filling a vase, and placing the cluster of berries and leaves therein. 'There, that is better. Well, now, we had better say "Good-night," hadn't we?' advancing for a kiss. Then, as with a second thought, 'But what did you come for, Penelope? Did you want anything?'

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'Uncle Carnoustie said he saw you run across the bridge and in by the garden door just now,' said Penelope with an effort. 'I — I thought he might be mistaken. You — you were not going out.'

As she spoke, she fancied that even in the dusky light — for no candles were lit, there being still a gleam in the heavens without — she thought she could perceive that a conscious stain dyed the other's cheek. Mina certainly paused before replying.

'Papa saw me, did he?' She affected to busy herself with the articles on her toilet table, turning her back on her interrogator. 'I did not see him. It was a pity we did not meet, if he wanted a companion. I suppose that was it? He was surprised at seeing me out, after bidding me "Good-night" with the rest. But really, when I came to think of it, I agreed with you that it was absurd to expect one to sleep at nine o'clock, so I went out after all, Penelope; I found that, like you, I was restless, and could not stay in the house. I seemed to need a little exercise after such a long day of sitting still. And it is such a warm, delicious evening ——' She paused for a rejoinder.

None came.

'Did — did papa send you up to me?' A slight curiosity manifested itself here.

'No.' For the life of her, Penelope could not utter another syllable.

'Oh! I thought he might; that was all. He might have wondered at my being out.'

'He did not say so. He is very — unsuspecting.'

'Of course; and what was there to suspect?'

'Besides, I was out too.'

'To be sure. We were all "tripping" if anyone was;' an attempted laugh. 'No one of the three can "cast it up" to the other, eh, Penelope?'

Penelope did not laugh. The speaker shot a glance of inquiry, as with one hand she began to unpin a collar brooch, and with the other affected to stifle a yawn. Did this visit mean anything, or not?

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No, of course not. Penelope was only in a tiresome mood. Perhaps she wanted to stop and talk — talk about the day's adventures — about Redwood — about any stupid, frivolous topic that was uppermost in her silly mind? That was not to be endured, and accordingly, 'Hurry up now, as you would say,' cried Mina, with good-humoured impatience. 'You have taught me to say, "Hurry up," Penelope, so it is fair you should have it turned against you. Have you anything to say, or not? It is too late to begin conversation, you know; but if you *want* anything ——'

'Only to know if it really was you — really *you*,' said Penelope, in a low voice. 'I — at first I did not believe it, but ——'

'Me? Oh, dear me, yes; it was me sure enough By the way, "me" is not correct grammar, is it, Penelope? What would mamma have said? One can't bother with grammar when one is tired and sleepy. You take my word for it, it was me,' pushing her gently through the doorway. 'What? You thought it was my wraith, did you?' a happy idea occurring. '*That* is at the bottom of all this, is it? Oho! You got a fright, Miss Penelope. You saw something, or papa saw something, and you and he put your wise heads together, and could not rest without clearing up the mystery? *Now* I begin to understand! Oh, dear me, how amusing! Who would have accused such a very modern young lady as you of being superstitious? Oh, well; you may tell papa, with my best respects, that it was no apparition he saw flitting across the bridge in the moonlight, but just my own self in my own proper person. You know what a "wraith" is, don't you?'

Penelope was turning slowly away.

'It is the spirit of a living man or woman,' called Mina gaily after her. 'But be reassured, my dear Penelope, it was not my "wraith" which was abroad to-night.' She laughed and shut the door.

'Would God it had been!' The laugh was answered by a heavy sigh, the reassurance by a starting sob.

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CHAPTER XXV.

'HOW IF IT WERE LOVE?'

What daunts thee now? What shakes thee so?
My sad soul say;
I see a cloud like curtain low
Hang o'er my way. — WHITTIER.

AND now Penelope must needs look her knowledge in the face. It availed no longer to cheat herself with fond hopes and ingenious suppositions, since Mina's own assurances had merrily dispelled every doubt, and her own lips had blown away the last shred of uncertainty.

How gay had been Mina's deceitful tongue — how easily had it worked! No confusion; no shame; scarce a blush upon her brow! After the first momentary hesitation about admitting an intruder on her privacy, she had almost seemed to enjoy an encounter which afforded such opportunity for masquerading.

Her plausible defence had been set in smiles.

With a fresh sickening of the heart Penelope had hearkened to her glib comments, her well-feigned suggestions, and noted the ring of tenderness in the accents which called up afresh the 'warm, delicious evening' turned to such account.

Good Heavens! that one so fair and young could be so base!

And then arose another, and a still more terrible afterthought. Could anyone, confronted by such a risk as her cousin had run that evening, have met it as Mina had done if it had been encountered for the first time? Mina was by nature timid, shrinking, cowardly. It could have been nothing but familiarity with danger which had eventually made her bold.

How often — and when — and where — had the scene in effect been acted before now? How many times had the idle inquiry, or perchance the remonstrance of tender solicitude, been turned aside by careless demeanour and light repartee?

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Penelope herself must have been a constant source of anxiety, yet it was clear that even to her cousin the treacherous girl had grown by degrees habituated. She had become an adept in her art.

As they had already done, recollections and half-slumbering suspicions now stormed anew the heart of the tortured Penelope; while every trivial incident whose passing impression had previously faded from her memory stood out once more to view, and refused to bear any other interpretation than that which explained the whole.

She found that from the very first day of her arrival at Carnoustie Castle, her cousin had been an enigma. She called to mind the first walk she and Mina had taken together; the bitterness expressed by the latter against her own people (a warmth of condemnation which had surprised Penelope, but which was now only too easily understood), and the romantic exultation with which the feats and prowess of Torquil Macalister had been dwelt upon — exultation which had then seemed only in the eyes of the stranger girl as amusingly exemplifying the family conceit. Mina had glorified everything and everybody belonging to her noble race; and whilst inveighing openly against their demerits, had secretly taken credit even for the stalwart bearing and valour of a family retainer.

Mina had shown absurd sensitiveness on the point. Her face had turned crimson with anger when Penelope, without a thought of offence, had quizzed Lord Carnoustie's fondness for his fool and farm servant, classing them together. Penelope, perceiving the effect of her jest, had, girl-like, used it as a weapon for teasing. Eventually she had had to drop the teasing.

Then there had been Ailsie's hints. With a sudden start, she now remembered Ailsie's anxiety, injunctions, and precautions. She had attributed them, as we know, to fears on the part of the old woman regarding her nursling's health, but now she knew that it was not of health Ailsie had been thinking.

That Ailsie knew all, that she knew as much as Penelope did, was not for a moment to be supposed, but that she was painfully on the alert, seeking to guard against some evil which might yet be averted — scotched, as it were, without being brought to the light — seemed only too probable.

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That no one else, neither father nor mother nor sisters, had experienced the veriest ripple upon the smooth surface of their implicit faith in Mina — Mina, who was to them the embodiment of youthful innocence and guilelessness — was apparent to the meanest understanding.

What, then, was Penelope to do? How was she to bear her part in the drama whose black shadow hung in front?

All through the long, light night, which seemed as though it would never end, she thought and thought. At times she wept, incited thereto by some straying emotion of tenderer quality than those which for the most part had dominion over her soul; but tears did not relieve her over-charged bosom, and soon dried, giving way afresh to shuddering contempt, and wild, fruitless wrath.

This again resolved itself into the helpless interrogation: 'What am I to do?'

To keep her detestable secret to herself was the last answer to such a demand. An involuntary spy she had been, an informer she might be, but no thought of sheltering herself behind the fear of such imputations entered into Penelope's heart.

Its only thought, its sole desire, was first how to save, and next how to shield her erring cousin.

Mina had entered upon a downward course, whose incline is ever frightfully rapid and perilous.

She must be stopped instantly, and stopped effectually.

How was this to be done?

To go to Mina's father? Lord Carnoustie would roar with rage, lock his daughter into her room, hound Torquil Macalister out of the district, and imagine that he had stamped out the whole disgraceful affair, even while smarting from the wound to the end of his days. Add to which, the whole countryside would ring with the tale; and it would be handed on from parent to child, till generations yet unborn would hear its echoes.

The same result would follow any allegations made before any member of the family. The truth ascertained, a high-handed policy would ensue, with widespread publicity and disgrace as its side issues; and perhaps — who could tell? — a defeat at the hands of the offending pair in the long run.

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Mina was just the girl to be crushed for the moment, and to revive presently, upon a lower and still baser level.

She would weep copiously, and promise abundantly, but would she give up the chief solace of her dull, uninteresting life, and consent to forego the sweets of love once tasted, at the commands of parents who had already shown themselves callous to its claims?

Penelope had heard Louisa's version of Mina's love story. Louisa had enjoyed relating the exciting incident, which always held a foremost place in the family annals; and having described with unction how complete had been the rout of the besieger and the triumph of the victorious garrison, had been not a little surprised to hear Penelope mutter: 'Poor thing! What a shame!' as her eye fell on the unconscious form of Mina in the garden below.

Mina had realised the strength of the forces around. She had seen it was hopeless to contend with them openly, and to her view the cruelty which had slammed the door without hesitation on her one chance of a happier lot, justified both her lasting resentment and her secret opposition.

Beneath Mina's soft and gentle exterior there rankled a festering spirit of rebellion. She owed one and all a grudge. Perchance the first beginnings of her present infatuation had had their source in that emotion.

They had not cared how they thwarted her — she would not care how she baffled them. For no reason — for the poor girl had never been told even of the paltry reason there was — they had turned away from the door a suitor, whose voice she had already learned to listen for, and towards whom every encouragement consistent with her own ideas of cold stiff dignity had previously been given — and why should she hesitate in future to choose for herself who should be his successor?

Her feelings were nothing to them — theirs should be nothing to her.

All this was now unfolded, and, as it were, spread out before Penelope's eyes.

She saw the whole, first bit by bit, then in one complete mosaic.

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Wounded in her tender youth, nipped in her budding womanhood, all the sweet sap of Mina Carnoustie's nature had turned to gall, and the gentle, yielding, trustful child had given place to the artful and double-faced woman.

Ah! if she had been differently treated in those early days!

Now it was too late. Penelope, a very child herself, yet wise with the wisdom so sorely needed, and so hopelessly lacking in her elders, perceived one thing with appalling clearness of vision at the present moment. No coercion, no supervision, would strike to the root of the evil which threatened her noble kith and kin.

Lord and Lady Carnoustie might do their utmost, they would but blazon abroad their own disgrace, and Mina, desperate, might descend to still lower depths than those to which she had stooped as yet.

Was there anyone Penelope could trust to bring her poor, foolish cousin to her senses?

Again and again she put the question to herself, varying it, sifting it, wringing from it in an agony each reiterated response of 'None.'

Then she would fling herself across the bed, and clench and tear the coverlid.

Something must be done — someone must do it.

Torquil Macalister must be prevailed upon to quit the place; authoritatively, or Torquil would laugh the request to scorn; persuasively, or Torquil's sullen spirit might revolt.

That the shepherd was not actuated by mere audacity and insolent ambition, Penelope owned with a fresh sinking of the heart. She could have dealt with this baser metal; but it would be a harder matter to quench in a vehement, passionate, undisciplined nature, the fire of love. It was love, however misdirected, which she had seen either aflame in fury, as on the rocky sea-shore, or melting in tenderness a few hours later on the quiet wood path. The mountaineer had lifted his eyes high, but he had shot their bolt straight.

That he was simply allowing himself to bask in the present without thought of the future, was the most rational solution of his presumptuous folly. Possibly it had been begun by some act

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of daring on his part, some feat which had elicited from Mina applause — or anxiety — or tears. Who could tell how long she had been watching him, marking him, admiring him in secret, before that day came? And there had been an explosion, and a revelation, and all barriers had fallen before the tumult.

But whatever might be the strength of his own feelings or of hers, it was impossible to suppose that either Mina Carnoustie or her presumptuous lover could imagine for a single moment that they could dare to hope for anything further.

Each must be equally well aware that recognition and sanction was not for them; and yet they were meeting in secret, and meeting constantly, at what hazard to both each knew only too well.

Perchance the sense of danger might be feeding the fuel of Mina's stolen happiness; but it could hardly be adding to that of a penniless menial, since detection must mean to him the sure and certain loss of all but life itself.

As a retainer of Lord Carnoustie's, he enjoyed a good position, an easy life, abundance for his simple requirements, and a field for the display of his simple vanity. Until the daughter of his lord stooped to cast over him the glamour of a new emotion, he had been content with his station, his surroundings, and himself.

The question now was, would the genuine passion with which Torquil Macalister had been inspired, yield to representations and entreaties? Would he consent to vanish decorously, once he learned that discovery had been made, and exposure was imminent?

Who could say?

Had the shepherd been actuated by a mere frenzy of ambition it would not have been difficult to deal with that ambition. Lord Carnoustie might have been enlightened, or semi-enlightened; might have been warned, at least, that trouble was in the wind, and induced quietly to rid himself of the offender, by procuring for him a better situation elsewhere.

He might even have done more. The offer of a farm on one of the Carnoustie estates in another county might have satisfied the claims of a humble subordinate, to whom such promotion meant an important rise in life.

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Was it impossible that even yet the complication might not thus be adjusted, supposing Penelope were to confide in her uncle; he would give Macalister the hint, the separation would be effected noiselessly, without let or hindrance, and Mina herself need never know that mortal eyes had penetrated her secret?

For a moment, Penelope's heart leaped at the thought. She might thus never have to seek the dreaded interview, and tear the mask from her cousin's face. She might never be called upon to bring the blush of shame to Mina's cheek, and to hear her faltering avowal.

Mina's father, quietly admonished, talked to, reasoned with, and not told too much, might be induced to control himself, and adopt the course proposed. More particularly if Lord Carnoustie knew that he was alone in Penelope's confidence. Lord Carnoustie, when not badgered and worried, and told how he was to think and to feel, not infrequently came in the end to the frame of mind he ought to have been in at the beginning, and it was quite likely that, acting on his own responsibility, he might act with dignity and delicacy under his present trial.

But even if the old lord, impelled by stress of circumstances, acted as became him, who was to answer for the success of his overtures, considering the nature of the man with whom he had to do?

Torquil Macalister, grimly tenacious, and snapping his fingers at the enraged threats of his unhappy master, rose before Penelope's shuddering vision, a sharp, distinct figure. She had told herself that he might be managed if he had merely been intoxicated by the honour of his dubious position, but should it be proved that he scoffed at the idea of bartering pardon and promotion for love — love however hopeless and misplaced — what could be done?

The night wore slowly on.

Penelope, half in half out of her little open window, watched the pale light of dawn glimmer across the ocean, and gradually steal athwart the sky. Her eyes, her cheeks, her hands were burning hot. She had never slept, nor laid herself down to

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sleep; and now the morning had come, and the birds were beginning to twitter among the branches.

Something must be thought of, and it seemed as if there were nothing left to think about.

The spreading light of day chilled every vein, for in it she saw the approach of the struggle, in which she — oh, misery! was there no way out of it! — must march to the front, and open her batteries, secure of nothing, dreading everything.

Slowly she undressed and laid herself upon the bed. The clock struck three, and, worn out at length, the unhappy girl fell into a wretched, muttering slumber, whose dreams were haunted by the same spectres which had made frightful the waking hours which preceded them.

She was on the craggy moorland, amid driving mists and darkness; lurking precipices beset her on every side; she durst not stir; she could not articulate a sound.

The cry of another, however, smote upon her ear; the loud agonised entreaty of one in mortal peril; and, straining her eyes in the thickening gloom, she discerned dimly a form — the form of her cousin Mina — flitting along a rugged ledge which overhung a terrible abyss.

Again and again the wild appeal was borne towards her, as the figure, weeping and wringing its hands, now leaned over the horrid chasm, now fled into the mists behind.

Fain would she have hastened to the rescue, but her feet, heavy as lead, were glued to the ground whereon she stood; and when she would have responded to the piteous cries her tongue refused to do its work.

And then — ah, heaven! — what happened then? The taunting mist wreaths took shape, and formed themselves into the likeness of a man, whose face she could not see, but whose deed was devilish — for he sprang up the face of the rock, and flew at the girl, and while she shrank, and wept, and implored, he locked her in his arms and, laughing aloud, leaped into the gulf whence he had come.

Penelope, with a smothered shriek, awoke. Her cheeks were streaming with tears.

Some one was calling to her through the half-open door,

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for the sun was high in the heavens, and Mina was already fully dressed and prepared to descend to the breakfast-room. It was Mina's voice which was summoning her cousin to rise and bear her part in the coming day.

CHAPTER XXVI.

'WHAT HAPPENED HERE,' SHE SAID, 'LAST NIGHT?'

'LAZY GIRL!' said Mina affectionately, as Penelope appeared half an hour afterwards. 'You cannot say you were not called when I was, Penelope; I heard a great rattling going on at your door, long before I went by. And Marie — but — why — are you not well, dear?' suddenly perceiving the pallor and strained eyelids which it was impossible should long evade observation. 'Was yesterday's excursion too much for you?'

Penelope murmured an inaudible response.

'I am so sorry,' said Mina, coming round the table to her. 'You have a headache, I can see. Mamma will doctor you; she knows all about headaches. And you must lie down in a cool room after breakfast. I wish you had not come down; I would have taken a tray up to you myself.'

'Indeed, Penelope looks far from well,' Lady Carnoustie took up the note. 'My dear, I am glad you made the effort to appear; but you might have known I should excuse you, if you were really indisposed. A long day like yesterday —— '

'Hoots — a long day!' It was now Lord Carnoustie's turn. 'A long fiddlestick!' he ejaculated scornfully. 'A lassie who can be running about at all hours of the night — oh, I'm not to say anything about that, amn't I?' perceiving signals of distress, 'oh, well — well; it was all right; Penelope and I were out for a bit in the evening, that was all,' to his wife, who was beginning to look inquiries — 'and Mina, she was out too. There was no harm in it, none in the world, so you needn't *glower* at us,' testily championing his co-delinquents. 'You took yourself

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off at such an unearthly hour, that no one could be expected to follow you; and it was a warm evening, so we took a turn — we each took a turn — that was all.'

'Yes, indeed, mamma, that was all,' said Mina, cheerfully.

Penelope's lip trembled. That cheerful accent cut her like a knife.

She noted that Mina's cup and plate were emptied as usual; fancied even that she had a better appetite than usual.

Certainly she was bustlingly attentive to the wants of others, and pressed the delicacies of the meal upon her cousin, who, contrary to her wont, appreciated neither the freshly-caught trout, nor the new-laid eggs, nor yet the honey, marmalade, and floury scones and cakes with which the table abounded.

Usually Penelope made an excellent figure at the repast. She was wont to say that until she came to Carnoustie Castle she had never known what a real breakfast was; and her host was delighted to remind her of this on the slightest indication of flagging energies. He said he could count upon Penelope to clear off the remains in every dish — and this was always a point with him. With nearly a score of servants in the kitchen, and any number of casual dependants greedy for scrap meals, he could not endure to see odds and ends of food neglected at his own table, and would prefer that even those who had no desire for more should consume the remnant, than that it should go downstairs. All in vain had it been pointed out to him a hundred times that the waste he perceived in the latter alternative was purely in his own imagination; he stuck to his whim, and Penelope was delighted with him for doing so. She would not, perhaps, have owned as much, but she was still a growing, hungry girl, albeit twenty years of age. She had taken a start, as young people occasionally do, somewhat late in life, and had added another inch to her stature during the previous six months.

Accordingly, the good food and the novel food she found in the old Scottish castle was a considerable enjoyment to her healthy young frame; and since Lord Carnoustie wanted the dishes cleared, she was willing to clear them when no one else would; wherefore he had grown to reckon upon her.

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But on this morning, as can readily be imagined, nothing tasted aright, and to eat at all required a strong effort. It was with a feeling of relief that she quitted the table at last.

She had, however, come to no decision in her own mind. She was still battling between a dozen opinions, and still torn in pieces by a thousand fears.

'Come and see Ailsie,' said Mina, linking her arm in that of her cousin. 'Ailsie likes us to look in about this time. Besides, she had not heard anything about yesterday. We are always expected to tell her about the picnic ——'

'Did you enjoy the picnic, Mina?'

'Did I? Of course I did — as much as I ever do. Why do you speak in that sepulchral tone? And look at me with that lugubrious expression? I suppose you found it dreary; but we are not used to your more exciting festivities, and we are quite satisfied. Certainly the weather was fine enough.'

'Yes; fine — and calm — and still — like all the rest,' said Penelope, fixing her eyes upon her. 'As you say, there were no exciting elements in the whole affair, everybody and everything was entirely serene and commonplace. Even the boatmen ——' She paused.

'Even the boatmen were very ordinary boatmen,' said Mina, 'but they rowed well, and that was all we wanted of any of them. Except Mr. Redwood, of course — Mr. Redwood is — eh, Penelope?' pressing her arm archly.

The arm slightly trembled.

'You do look bad, you poor little creature,' cried Mina, next. 'You are regularly shaking — I felt you just now. Come up to your room, and I will come and sit with you; read to you, perhaps.'

'No, no.'

'You would rather go to sleep? But you have only just got up! Well, here is Ailsie, she will prescribe for you. Ailsie, here is Miss Penelope eating no breakfast, and very white in the face, to say nothing of red in the eyes. What can you do for her?'

'It's the heat,' said Ailsie, peering with friendly commiseration. 'Let me look at your tongue, missy. 'Deed, an' it's no

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sae muckle amiss. It's reid — no white. Aye, I'm thinkin' it'll be jist the heat. Lie doon a wee and I'll get ye somethin'——'

'No, thank you, Ailsie; I want nothing'

But on a sudden it occurred to her that she did want something; she wanted Ailsie herself. To Ailsie's faithful ear she would confide her root of bitterness; with her she would take counsel; and between them they might perhaps — perhaps ——

'May I lie down here for a little?' she suggested, looking round. 'The maids are upstairs in the bedrooms.'

'I could tell them to finish yours quickly,' said Mina.

'But still they would be all about, rushing back and forwards, and making a noise.' Penelope put her hand to her head. 'If Ailsie does not mind I will stay here; it is so cool and pleasant,' sinking down into the huge chintz-covered armchair, which fitted into the open window.

'And you don't want talking, do you?' said Mina.

Penelope hesitated.

She did not want talking of the kind her cousin meant, but she was too truthful to avail herself of the evasion. 'I should like to talk to Ailsie a little,' she said gently. 'If you will not think it rude, Mina, I would rather have her to myself.'

'Aye, she'll tell me what's wrang wi' her,' added Ailsie, confident that this was to be the communication and flattered by the tribute to her medical skill. 'Jist you leave us thegither, Meenie, an' I'll see to her. Noo then, dearie,' as Mina nodded and tripped away; 'Noo then, jist tell auld Ailsie what's wrang. Maybe something's gane agley wi' ye? Maybe yer faither — is't the post whattan's brocht ye ill news?' — running over all the suppositions she could think of to make the confidence more easy.

But Penelope shook her head.

She was sitting rigid and strained, her hands clasped, her dry lips apart. It seemed as if she could not bring herself to speak.

At length, 'Is the door locked?' she whispered.

'Locked? Na; there'll naebody come in, wi'out it's ane o' oorsels, an' ——'

'It's one of ourselves I most dread, Ailsie. Lock the door.'

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'Na, Miss Penelope, we munna. Bide a wee noo,' as Penelope made a motion to rise and herself carry out her command. 'Hark to me,' said the old woman, gently stretching forth a detaining hand. 'If yon door's snebbit, it'll mak a stir. A'body kens yon door is niver snebbit; and what then for suld it be snebbit when you and me's oor lane? That'll gar them wonder. Let-a-be, there's a gude bairn; and if onybody seeks to wun in ——'

'Promise me that you will stop them — that you won't let them come in. They must not! They must not!'

'Na; they shanna. Dinna be feared,' patting her hand soothingly. 'Jist you say your say ——'

'Ailsie, you don't know — you *don't know* — what my "say" is.'

Something in the tone arrested Ailsie's stroking fingers. Instinctively she was on her guard.

'Na, my bairn, I dinna ken. Aiblins it's aboot your faither ——'

'It has nothing to do with my father.'

Ailsie coughed discreetly.

'Aiblins there's some young gentleman ——'

'*Gentleman?* No.'

Ailsie coughed again.

'Aweel, ye ken, I'm no guid at the guessin'. An', Miss Penelope, the time's gangin' by,' she hinted.

'I know — I know. But oh! it is such a dreadful thing I have to tell. Ailsie,' quickly, 'is that anyone at the door? I am sure I heard someone outside the door.'

'I dinna think it, dearie ——'

'There is; I tell you, there is. Someone is breathing there now, and the light in the passage is gone.' Then suddenly bounding from her seat, she was at the door before the supposed eavesdropper could vanish, and, throwing it open, disclosed the form of her cousin Mina.

'I just came to bring you this little draught from mamma,' said Mina sweetly. But Penelope dashed the glass out of her hand.

'That ends it!' she cried, quivering from head to foot.

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'Ailsie, I don't need you now. I have got someone else. Yes, you,' to her cousin. 'You, Mina, *you*,' clutching her fiercely by the arm. 'I would have spared you if I could, though I hardly knew how; but now — come quickly, come,' dragging her prisoner along with an authority that brooked no demur. 'We can end this farce now. *I* am not ill. *I* am not in need of physic. It is *you* — you who ——'

'Hush! They will see you — they will hear you. Hush! I say. For Heaven's sake, Penelope, do not speak so loud. And let go my arm. I will come with you; I will do anything you wish, only don't — don't ——'

'Don't what?' demanded Penelope in a loud, rasping voice.

'Let people hear you, dear.' The words were almost breathed into her ear.

'Ah — Bah!' cried Penelope, flinging away the hand laid on hers. 'That's all *you* care for. You can lie, and cheat, and ——'

'Penelope! Penelope!'

'Don't speak to me. Wait till I speak to you. Don't dare to speak to me. How dare you call me by my name?'

The anguish of the night had gathered itself together into a storm of fury, and the speaker, beside herself with passion, was unaware of the height of her voice.

To Mina, however, this for the moment was the one consideration. How should she quell those penetrating tones? What would be the immediate result of this loud, uncontrolled onslaught?

The servants were in every corner, emerging from doorways, hurrying along passages, busy with their morning's work; if they were to overhear and repeat — she *must* get Penelope silenced.

'Come in here,' Penelope was beginning, as the two approached their several rooms, but both rooms were occupied. Even the speaker perceived that nothing could be done then and there, and Mina, snatching at her opportunity, laid hold of it. 'Come where we can be alone, and I will hear you, hear every word you have to say, and — and do whatever you wish,' she murmured, in agitation scarcely less than that of her companion. 'Quick — your hat,' taking it down from the wardrobe, 'and here is mine,' fetching her own. 'Now come out — out of the house — where

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we can talk, and no one can hear, or interrupt; you are so very careless, dear Penelope.'

'Careless!' Penelope laughed a mocking, stinging laugh. 'Careless! Never mind. *You* are careful enough. Careless? I wonder if I shall ever be careless again, after what I have seen, after what I saw last night.'

Swift as thought, Mina perceived that the bolt had fallen.

Until this moment she had had no time to think, or consider how much had become known to her cousin, how much had been conjectured, and how much might yet be concealed. That Penelope by some means or other had possessed herself of information which had roused her anger and contempt, was, of course, palpable, but might not such information be vague, uncertain, undefined?

She would, of course, have to meet very awkward charges, and pass an uncomfortable hour or so; and she would most certainly have to be more vigilant and discreet in the future than she had been in the past, for of late she had had more than one narrow escape; but she thought she could manage Penelope, if only Penelope could be got out of the house, and out of the range of others, whom it might not be so easy to turn aside.

Penelope, instructed by her cousin, had been led to suppose that many of Mina's ways were permitted, nay sanctioned, which she might now have to learn were simply unknown. A great deal would come to light if this impulsive girl were to blaze forth her accusation in the presence of bystanders.

Accordingly Mina cowered in her secret soul at the sound of Penelope's voice, and scarce breathed until the garden door was left behind, and all fear of being overheard was passed.

Cunning, the coward's instinct, then re-asserted itself. Penelope must be entreated, cajoled, bought over. Little did she know Penelope!

Penelope meanwhile was rushing down the slope, heedless of dewy grass and bushes. An idea had occurred which she was impatient to carry into effect, and paying no heed to the lagging steps of her companion who would fain have proceeded more slowly, she hurried across the little bridge and plunged into the wood.

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Where in the world was she going?

Doubt, however, was quickly laid at rest. Only a few hundred yards up the narrow incline, and just after it took a turning, Penelope raised her hand, and with the other laid hold of her cousin's dress, and called a halt.

Her eyes glittered and her nostrils dilated, her bosom rose and fell. Then she slowly pointed to a spot.

'What happened here,' she said, 'last night?'

CHAPTER XXVII.

A WRESTLE FOR THE MASTERY.

THERE was no answer. Mina covered her face with her hands. She had not expected the accusation to take this form, and for the moment its directness and comprehensiveness were overwhelming.

It was obviously no tell-tale tongue which had tattled into Penelope's ear; there were no mere surmises and suspicions on her cousin's part, which could by dexterous care be smoothed away; but it was a plain, unvarnished fact with which the accused had now to deal — one which could not be glossed over, softened, or denied. She shook mutely, ready for submission or rebellion, as occasion might offer.

'Speak,' said Penelope, at last. She was not deceived by the other's attitude. 'Speak. You have been silent long enough. The time for silence has gone by. Mina, if there be any honour left in you, any honesty, any truth, speak out now, and tell me the meaning of what I saw — of what *I saw* — take place here — on this spot — a few hours ago.'

No response; no movement.

'It was a scene to blind my eyes,' Penelope went on, her lips curling, and her head up-reared; 'treachery, deceit, degradation; oh, you proud Carnousties, you fond parents, you poor, trustful, confiding master and mistress — *this* is how your own

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child and your base-born menial serve you! *This* is how they repay you! Speak, girl, can't you?' and she clutched and shook the other's arm. 'No need for so much confusion now; there can be but little shame left. Speak the truth. Was it for the first time you were ——' She ground her teeth, loathing the words she could not speak.

Still no audible reply; only a faint whimper.

Penelope paused. ('Is this real, or is it only a blind?' she was saying to herself.) 'Mina, take down your hands; take them down, I say; don't stand whining there, but strike one honest blow in your own defence. You must have *something* to say. No woman could do as you have done without making *some* excuse to herself. Stop that muttering,' stamping her foot with a frown; 'speak *out* — good heavens! — speak *out;* and let us have the whole truth at last.'

'What have I to speak out about?' said Mina, thus forced to find voice in spite of sullen reluctance. 'You have said all there is to say, I suppose. Since you saw what you did I should not have thought you required to be told anything more.'

'I require to be told how long this has been going on?'

'Long before *you* came to the place; does that satisfy you?'

'Before I came?' Penelope was thunderstruck.

'Yes, before you came.'

'You have been carrying on this clandestine ——'

'There is no need to particularise. Yes; I say "Yes," to everything. There, that will do. Let me go. You will tell it all to papa and mamma, of course, and you will think you have done a very Christian act, and Torquil Macalister will be driven with ignominy from the place; and I —' (her face altered, her arms fell by her side, the last words died away in a faint despairing whisper) — 'and I — what will become of me?'

Penelope, who had opened her mouth to speak, closed it again.

At the same moment a loud joyous note rang through the woods, and both started at the sound.

It was Torquil, the shepherd, calling to his dogs, and in another moment a collie bounded into view, heralding the approach of his master.

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It was now Mina Carnoustie's turn to seize her companion by the wrist. 'Don't let him see anything amiss; don't, in Heaven's name,' she exclaimed in a vehement undertone. 'Penelope, you don't know, you can't think; it would be too dreadful; he has such a haughty spirit. If he were spoken to he might — dear Penelope — for once — *for once* ——'

Penelope shook off the touch as though it were defilement. 'Do you think I would speak to that *reptile?*' she said.

When Torquil passed, swinging along as though he trod on air, and performed his usual deferential obeisance to the young ladies, gracefully as ever, she made the proper acknowledgment with even a shade more deliberation than usual, in order to mark the fulness of her contempt. Was it likely she would bandy words or even looks with a creature so unworthy?

The break, however, was so far salutary, in that it enabled Penelope to overcome her first outbreak of passionate contempt, and to recall some of the gentler emotions of the night, whose echoes she had dimly caught in her cousin's 'What will become of me?'

A heavy sigh burst from her lips.

Mina was still looking excited and alarmed. Yet it seemed as though with it all some of the blithe exultation of her lover had found its way into her bosom also, and as she looked after his retreating figure, Penelope guessed the meaning of her kindling eye. When all was said and done, Mina was still proud of her choice. Neither one nor the other of the treacherous pair must be driven to extremities.

With a strong effort, she mastered herself sufficiently to adopt a calmer tone.

'I have to clear myself,' she said, 'for it may appear to you that I have been playing the part of a spy ——'

'Yes, you have,' eagerly. It was something to have such a counter charge to prefer.

'I have not. I supposed that you would think so; but I have not. Mina, don't you know that all these months in which I have been with you, all day and any hour of the day, these months during which you yourself confess that this miserable affair has been going on, I have never, no, not for a single

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moment, suspected it? There were many things about you that puzzled me; and I did not always like what I saw. I saw that you were deceitful and artful. You were continually asking me not to mention what you did and where you went. You were disturbed about trifles, and altogether peculiar and strange. But as for my ever dreaming you could be so false, so base ——' She stopped, endeavouring to suppress the reproaches with which her lips were brimming.

'Go on,' said Mina stonily.

'I thought when I noticed how anxious Ailsie was about you, that she was afraid for your health; and after something of the kind had passed between us, it seemed to me that I had found out the cause of everything, and I was quite happy that day — sorry for you, but happy, because you were not to blame, if you were odd and unaccountable and not like other people.'

'That is what Ailsie thinks, is it?'

'It was what *she wished me* to think,' said Penelope with some hesitation. 'Perhaps it was not altogether what she thought herself. You know best about that. She quieted me for the time. Then there was your loss of the brooch. Why do you never wear that brooch? Why have I never seen nor heard of it since or before that day?'

Mina raised her head and unclasped her dress. 'Look here,' she said; the silver bauble gleamed within.

'It was his gift?' said Penelope, breathing quickly. 'I see. You sent *him* to look for it on the moor, when *I* was told you had lost a pencil-case?'

Mina smiled.

'No wonder he was angry when Mr. Redwood offered to be your escort to the spring, yesterday. It was he, Torquil Macalister, who was enigmatical then. He did not see me, but I heard him cursing in his own tongue, as he looked at you both. You had to soothe his "haughty spirit" afterwards, I presume?' ironically.

'You are right.' Mina was now the calmer of the two.

'And to grant him last night's meeting?'

'Yes.'

'For which you had again to lie to me. And now you think

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I followed you out, and tracked you to this spot, in order to discover your secret? Oh, how little did I suppose there was any such secret! By the merest accident I strolled this way, and, hearing voices, I imagined that some of your servants had stolen out to meet each other — it would have been no harm if they had — and as I did not want to surprise them and make them uncomfortable, and had no time to get out of the way, I hid myself behind those bushes,' pointing to the spot, 'and waited for the lovers to pass by. They did pass —— ' She could not proceed.

'It shocked you, did it, Penelope?'

'Mina, how can you speak like that? How can you — how can you? To have so stooped — so degraded yourself —— '

'I do not admit that I have degraded myself. Penelope, you have told your story, will you listen to mine? It may not in your eyes excuse me — perhaps it hardly does in my own — but I think,' she faltered, paused, then resumed more firmly, 'I think it ought to make you pity me.'

'I do pity you already. God knows I pity you, dear, *dearest* Mina.' A quick turn of feeling. 'Pity you? My very heart has been breaking with pity for you all night long — all through the night in which I never slept —— '

'Was *that* the cause of your looks this morning, Penelope?' The idea seemed to strike home. 'Were you grieving for *me?*'

'Yes, indeed, dear cousin; broken-hearted for you. If I have been cruel now —— '

'Nay, you have not been cruel.'

'It was because I was so wild with shame and grief and perplexity. I knew not what to do, or whom to go to. Mina, why did you come and listen at Ailsie's door? It was that which set me on fire. I scarcely knew what I was saying, or where I was going. I —— ' She sobbed aloud.

'I suspected you had heard something, and were about to communicate it to Ailsie, and I wished to prevent your doing anything of the kind,' said Mina, in a matter of fact tone. 'I did not mean to come in, unless I were required.'

'And you heard — what did you hear?'

'I did not hear much; you came out too quickly.'

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'Mina, how could you?'

'It was necessary. I have had to defend myself for a long time now. You said you would listen to my story, and I will not be long; and, Penelope, try to believe that for once — for once — I am telling you the truth. Penelope, you know us now as a family; you have lived among us long enough to be no stranger. You see the warped, cramped, stunted creatures we are in mind and soul; we daughters of a fine old race; we descendants of noble wives and mothers; of wise and good women, who would have shuddered to see us what we are. Do you know that we might not always have been so? That there was a time when each one of us was a bright and happy child, free of tongue and heart, ready for anything, eager for everything; longing, above all, to know and see and learn the stuff the world is made of. Then our parents took us in hand, and the slow rigid process began by which every natural growth was stopped, and every natural instinct crushed. We were to be not what God made us, but what mamma wanted us. We were never granted a reason, or an explanation. "It is enough that I wish it," was the formula which closed every controversy. We were not to read, except it were the weak, childish literature she provided, and that when we were women grown; newspapers were put out of our reach; what people were thinking and doing in the world was carefully kept from us, except when it jumped with our parents' own inclinations and opinions. Even then it was dealt out to us grudgingly. We were not to discuss the subjects of the day. Our religion was to be the religion mamma dispensed. We were punished if we did not welcome it and receive it in every particular. We were allowed no friendships, for mamma thought it was a bad thing for girls to get together and talk. Even you, Penelope, when you came — and even now when we are crushed and shapen, and have taken the form designed for us, and have no life left in us — even now, we were warned, or I was, not to be contaminated by your worldly wisdom and knowledge. This has been our education; it only needed the finishing touch,' she paused, 'and that came to me — six years ago. Can you guess what it was?'

'I know.' Penelope bent her head. She had been expecting this.

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'You know? They told you. Oh yes, their own version doubtless. You see, by this time, my poor sisters have lost as it were their identity, and they who were once the persecuted are in turn the persecutors. They watch me now, as they were watched before. They are resolute to make me what they have been made. I do not blame them. I blamed them once, but that is long past; only it might help you to understand, if I — shall I explain?'

Penelope pressed her hand.

'We were staying away from home on one of our rare visits,' continued her cousin. 'I had barely left the school-room, and all the world was bright before me. I thought everyone I met kind, and good, and pleasant. Mamma was not so stern with me as she had been with Louisa and Joanna, and though, perhaps, I was not always *quite* open with her, I did not on the whole abuse her confidence. But we never ran to our mother with our secrets, our outcries, our wants and demands, as other children do. Even now when mamma talks with the elder ones, and thinks she has raised them to their proper level, it is she who originates every idea and opinion, and they are there merely to echo and applaud. You will see, then, that I was not likely to confide either to her or to them that I — that a new world had opened before me. Mr. Etheridge was handsome, clever, good. He talked to me as no one had ever talked before, and in a few days I had learned to feel that I could be happy with him — at least that I *was* happy, and that I had never been the same with anyone else. Penelope, it all fell away like that mist upon the ocean. There was no explanation — at least I never had any. He came here — he had told me he would come, and asked my leave to do so, in a way that could have borne but one interpretation, and when he came, I ——'

She stopped.

'Yes — you?'

'I was not allowed to see him. I was forced to remain in my room upstairs, and he was given to understand that he was to return no more.'

'And you have never met each other since?'

'Never.'

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'He must have been a very weak man,' said Penelope, with some asperity, 'to be put off so easily. Mina, he could not have been in earnest; at least, he could have had no strength of purpose — no tenacity.'

'Perhaps not. I do not know. But, you see, we cannot tell in what light my absence was placed before him. I have often wondered — conjured up the scene — heard papa's and mamma's voices giving the easy explanation; and the more I have thought of it, the more certain I am that they must have been resolute to represent me as voluntarily avoiding him, and desirous of making such avoidance marked. Their very silence on the point leads me to be sure of this. They evidently never anticipated his prosecuting his quest any further, and were well satisfied to have disposed of him so easily. I never could summon courage to ask for the details; but by piecing together such scraps of information as I caught up, I gathered that Mr. Etheridge was to be forgotten, and that I was not even to be told why. Can you wonder, Penelope, that I vowed then and there that should there ever seem to be the dawning of any other love for me I would hide it in my own breast, and take my own course?'

She paused a few minutes, then resumed. 'There never has been such till this spring. You know how it began. I nearly let you into the secret — at least, I felt as though I had — on the very first morning after your arrival. I was in danger, and Torquil saved me; saved me as no one else could have had either the strength or the courage to do. Instead of approaching from behind, which might have startled me — and I was standing on a frightfully perilous brink, you must remember — he climbed up the sheer face of the precipice, and placed himself between me and death. I broke down; I betrayed my feelings, my admiration ——'

'That will do,' said Penelope, in a hard, dry voice.

'You are angry again; but I ought to clear Torquil.'

'I am not angry, but I am sickened and disgusted. If it had been anyone else — anyone in your own station — any man, however inferior in rank, who was ordinarily refined and educated — nay, I will even say, any man with common honesty and honour! But just see already how you have been worked

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upon to be a party to his treachery. He has abused the trust reposed in him as a servant — you as a daughter. Had it been a mere shock of betrayal, and had you instantly agreed to separate, and forget each other — but, Mina, you can calmly own to weeks and months of concealment, falsehood ——' Then suddenly, 'You went to meet him that day you left me at the cottage in the glen!'

'I did. He was waiting by the waterfall.'

'You said you wished to see another sick man.'

'Not "sick" — I did not say a "sick" man.'

'Why not? You might have said it; it would have added nothing to the lie. You meant me to believe you were visiting another of your father's cottages, where you could be of use, as at the one we were in.'

'Yes. I meant you to believe that, Penelope.'

'Well?'

'I have told you all. Six years ago I made up my mind that I owed neither duty nor obedience to parents who could treat me as mine had done; and when the struggle came I did not see that I owed them — or anyone — truth, either. To blindfold you all was my only weapon; and I used it.'

'He also apparently.'

'His crime was nothing,' said Mina, her eyes flashing. 'You would say he forgot his duty? Pooh! What is his "duty"? Has he served my father any less faithfully — has he neglected his work — has he saved himself by night or by day, on the weary moor or soaking hill-top, because he has dared to raise his eyes to his master's daughter? What has my father to complain of? Did not the patriarch Jacob do the same? Did ——'

'Don't talk folly,' said Penelope, sharply. Her tears had dried upon her cheeks. 'You, I commiserate, I pity, I forgive; but for this man — this treacherous, smooth-faced scoundrel, who can let your father's hand rest on his shoulder, and look him in the face, and know that he is doing that which would break his very heart in two — for him ——'

'Hush!' said Mina, in a cold, clear tone. 'Hush! You must not speak like that, for — I love him.'

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

'WHAT SIGNIFIES A LIE, MORE OR LESS?'

WITHIN an hour, nevertheless, she had agreed to renounce him. Argument, expostulation, and representation had had their due effect, when joined to a consciousness of being in Penelope's power; though, perhaps, it is not too much to say that it was the latter conviction which eventually carried the day.

Be that as it might, the erring Mina was at length reduced to trembling submission, and before the two girls quitted their leafy screen, had promised everything and bowed to every decree.

Once discovered, she had indeed known from the first that resistance must be hopeless; but there had been an instinctive desire to palliate her offence in Penelope's eyes, or at all events to enlist her sympathy.

Penelope had sympathised, but she had condoned nothing, and thereupon Mina had thrown up her arms, and abjectly quailed before every mandate. Penelope's decision had been that on the instant withdrawal of Torquil Macalister from the scene, and on her receiving his solemn word, together with that of her cousin, that all should be unreservedly at an end between them, she would not betray their secret. Unless these terms were agreed to and rigidly carried out, she would go straight to Lord Carnoustie.

With dejected mien and swimming eyes Mina promised on behalf of her lover. Yes, he would go — for her sake. She would tell him.

'You will tell him nothing,' said Penelope, significantly. Then, as her cousin looked surprised, 'You will never see him — never speak to him again. You will give me a letter,' — Mina started, — 'do not be afraid. I will deliver it myself,' said Penelope, looking at her steadily. 'And I will take care that he reads it.' Then she put her arm round the other's neck and for the first time pressed a kiss upon her pale cheek.

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Penelope was very young — she was now almost happy.

Shall we be doing her an injustice if we suspect that in the rebound of her spirits she experienced a sense of elation which made all the past endurable and all the future possible?

At first, she had been crushed to pieces, absolutely numb beneath the overwhelming responsibility laid upon her, but now — now all was bright again, and all the brightness was due to her. At last she had done something in life worth doing.

We fear this will be incomprehensible to many readers. Hours like those from which my heroine has just emerged are not so lightly forgotten by those over whom the storms of life have passed, and are apt to leave scars which time can but slowly, if ever, efface. But in youth it is so natural to be happy — so frightful to be sad and desponding. The blacker the night of sorrow, the fresher and clearer the dawn of hope and gladness which succeeds.

Thus Penelope knew now no further fears. She kissed and embraced her cousin a hundred times. She vowed that Mina should never hear another word, never behold a look of reproach; she bade her be of good cheer, cast the past behind her, have faith in the future, and consolation in the present.

She would be her poor Mina's guardian angel; they would be all in all to each other; have no secrets from each other; never more shun each other's society.

She planned plans; instituted ideas; the whole morning passed away only too rapidly; and at length the position of the sun in the heavens warned them that it was time to return within doors.

It was arranged that Penelope, in place of her cousin, should meet Torquil Macalister on the moor at the trysted hour that evening, and deliver to him the few written words by which he was to be informed that discovery had taken place, and that upon every consideration he must at once depart from the neighbourhood, to see the writer's face no more.

'It will be dreadful for him,' sighed Mina, the tears again rising. 'You do not think of what it will be to Torquil, Penelope.'

'No, I do not,' said Penelope, shortly.

This was the only time she adopted that tone, now that the

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compact was sealed; but her indignation and contempt had by this time focussed themselves upon the treacherous Highlander, and the very sound of his name was repugnant to her feelings.

Mina saw that it would not do to go on. It would have yielded her some poor satisfaction to have expatiated on the beauty and ardour of her lover, to have recounted tales of his devotion and prowess, and sighed over the cruelty of fate, which could make all these of no avail against pride of birth — but she caught the beginning of a frown on Penelope's brow, and checked herself.

Penelope was but a child, but she had a lip with which no one would dare to trifle.

And then, Mina could not but own that her cousin had been generous as well as brave. A word from her and the whole house would have been turned into a raging Pandemonium, and finally and for ever into a stifling prison-house. Of what would have been said and done she shuddered to think. She could not dwell on what the hot-blooded Gael might not have been goaded into by lashing scorn, without the dewdrops starting upon her forehead.

From this Penelope had saved her — saved him. Penelope had solemnly promised to shield Torquil and keep his insolent secret — the words were Penelope's, but Mina durst not cavil at them — if Torquil obeyed instructions, and departed without again transgressing.

A question then arose. Could Lord Carnoustie thus suddenly lose one of his most valued and necessary dependants without raising a commotion which might be unfortunate?

'He must go,' said Penelope, decidedly. 'It is for him to put what colour he chooses upon it. I don't suppose he will care what is said behind his back, once he is in another part of Scotland.'

'Of course he will care, Penelope. How is he to live? My father must give him a character ——'

'A *character?* Oh, to be sure,' said Penelope, 'I had forgotten. Yes, he will want a *character*,' and she was about to pass some cutting observations, but refrained. It would be unworthy of her triumph to gall this poor weak creature further.

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'He must make up some plausible excuse for leaving, — let him say anything, — what does a lie more or less signify?' she appended, disdainfully. 'He can have a dying parent, or the offer of a better situation, or a hundred things. Anything will do.' She meant to say 'Anything will do for this mean, skulking traitor. He is above nothing, not too honest for any tale of imposture;' but Mina perceived not the satire.

'Papa is so fond of Torquil, that he is sure to make a difficulty,' she said. 'He will be terribly put out as it is; and there will be a still greater fuss unless a very urgent case can be made out. Could you suggest one to him, Penelope? Could you make up a story for him?'

'Not I, indeed.' Penelope's tongue would fain have added, 'I would not touch it with a pair of tongs.'

'He has no parents,' proceeded Mina, thoughtfully.

'What does that matter?'

'How can they be dying when they are not alive? They have been dead many years.'

'You are squeamish. They can be anywhere, and anything. Let them live — in order to die. They can live in Gaelic — and die in English. I warrant Torquil will know how to accomplish this and all other magic arts. Your father does not know anything of his shepherd's family affairs? No? That's all we need, then. Torquil must have a dying parent — we will not stint his choice, he may himself decide upon the sex, — and he must be so overcome with natural anxiety and distress, that he will have betaken himself off to "far Lochaber," or any other "far" spot, by the early boat, before we at the castle are awake and stirring. When he has reached that desired haven, he can write all about his penitence and dutiful affection, and find that he must remain in its vicinity, by the dying parent's express desire, and beg for a character from his dear, kind master. Your father will fume and fret, but he will suspect nothing; and the goodness of his heart will make him put pen to paper forthwith, and despatch such a flaming account of his excellent Torquil's faithful servitude — bah! it makes me sick to think of it! Mina, is it possible you feel no shame ——'

'Oh yes — yes, indeed, Penelope,' in terrified haste. 'I

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know you are very right, dear Penelope, and I have been very wrong; but do pray, dear kind cousin, say no more about it. You can't think how sorry I am ——'

'And frightened,' added Penelope to herself.

But she was well pleased that things had taken this turn. During the morning she had seen her cousin, now one thing now another, prostrate, rebellious, justifying her actions, and indulging in bitter recriminations against others, anon relapsing into tenderness and self-pity, until at last she appeared to have gained a mood easier to control; she seemed to have some real desire to hear the last of an ugly scrape.

'We shall do better now,' internally commented the little martinet by her side. 'I shall have to be pretty stiff with her; but now that she is plaintive and piteous, I know where I am. It was not Mina at all when she gave such a rational, circumstantial account of her wrongs. We were both wound up to the pitch of grandiloquence; but neither of us is equal to the effort of maintaining it. There! that is my last, anyhow. Now for Mina and me in our real selves. I have got to take the poor thing in tow,' and then she began to sing.

'How can you sing?' said Mina, looking reproachfully round. 'There is nothing to sing about.'

Neither there was, and Penelope being thus reminded that the other's heart was still sore, though her own was relieved, could not but feel a little confused for the moment. She plucked up spirit, however, and it was on the tip of her tongue to say, 'Why should I not sing? I have done no wrong. I am not afraid of anybody; and if I feel gay again, I have a right to feel gay;' but she refrained. She was learning to forbear.

'I won't sing if it vexes you,' she said, cheerily. 'Only, you see, when I have had a bad time, and come out of it, I always feel sort of happy; I can't help it. And you must know, Mina, that all my life long I have had such a great, great wish to do *something* for *somebody* — something really *worth doing* — and now I can't help feeling that I have done it! Yes, I do, that is the truth. Isn't it horribly vain and egotistical? Of course. Well, anyhow that's *me* — that's what makes me sing. You

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must trust me, Mina, and let me manage all the rest of this myself. It's going to be managed splendidly. All you have got to do is to let me worry along my own way, and you will see that everything will come right.'

'Oh, yes, I dare say it will, Penelope.' Mina gave a little doleful smile. 'I am sure you are very good and clever, Penelope.'

('I wish she would not *cringe*,' muttered Penelope to herself. 'Of course I am good and clever. I know *that* for myself.') Aloud, she responded gaily, 'I shall be as true as steel to you, and you must be as true as steel to me. It must be steel meeting steel, instead of Greek meeting Greek. Not a breath of this shall ever pass my lips as long as you keep faith with me; but if — who's that, I wonder?' suddenly catching a view of two figures approaching the front door. 'Mr. Redwood, as I'm a living woman! Mr. Redwood and his friend — the friend who was to arrive last night. Dear me! this is very polite of Mr. Redwood, but it is not particularly lucky for us. We are not much to look at, we two, this morning. And it is us they have come to see, and no one else. You, my dear Mina, have got watery eyes and a glazed nose — that does not intensify your beauty; while I am just about reduced to the level of a ferret. I only took one look in the glass this morning, but that look was sufficient. I saw the most horrible little white and pink face. It is rather hard that Mr. Redwood should choose this morning of all mornings to — let them get inside first, Mina,' holding her back. 'They have not seen us, and we can dart in by the garden door once they are out of sight. And do, for goodness sake, take off that pink dress,' she added suddenly.

'This pink dress! I wore it yesterday for the first time.'

'Give it away. Never let me see you in it again. It would always remind me of what I want to forget!'

'You are right. I understand. But, Penelope, I really have not another ready, and it would seem odd to change for luncheon; we never do, you know.'

'Does that matter?'

'It might be thought ——'

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'What?'

'That I changed for Mr. Redwood. You know what the idea is about him.'

'Nonsense,' said Penelope, sharply. It gave her a twinge of undefinable annoyance that her cousin should have thought of such a thing. What was Redwood to Mina, and what did it signify whether there were any 'idea' about him or not?

'She can't have every one,' muttered she to herself. 'I believe she will want the friend next, whoever he may be.'

However, she gave in about the frock. It might be awkward if Lady Carnoustie took note that a change had been made, and this was a thing Lady Carnoustie was very likely to do. A mere sentiment was not worth this. She was now thinking of herself. What had she time for? How should she improve her own appearance?

She did improve it, and that involuntarily; for the fugitives were caught point-blank on the staircase, in the very heat of their flight; and Felix Merriman thought he had never seen two pretty girls blush as these two did in his life before.

Felix was a brisk, chatty young man, who knew lots of girls and adored them all. Directly he heard that there were two pretty ones within hail, and that his host was on easy terms with the family, he gave Redwood no peace till he had agreed to walk over to Carnoustie Castle.

Couldn't they go to luncheon? Why should they not go to luncheon?

The luncheon hour was everybody's hour; you were sure of finding people in; and they liked you to come.

Redwood, he vowed, was too formal and serious.

In vain Redwood hinted that formality and seriousness suited some people, notably the people who lived at Carnoustie Castle, and in vain did he endeavour to retard the rapidity of his friend's conclusions; he was obliged to own that he had been spending the whole previous day in company with the family, and that he had been desired to walk over to luncheon any day without invitation.

That acknowledged, all further resistance was useless.

In his own mind he thought it too soon to trespass again upon

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the hospitality of his recent entertainers, and that his doing so might look as if he had more serious intentions than any which he as yet entertained — but he did not care to discuss the point with Merriman.

Merriman was not an intimate friend — having indeed been selected for an invitation on the present occasion mainly because his acquaintanceship would not warrant an inquisition into Redwood's state of mind. Others, who knew him better, might have expected to be taken into confidence, might have reverted to unpleasant memories, and with tactless goodwill have blundered into uncomfortable quicksands. But Merriman had never been admitted to close quarters; he would do very well to come and shoot at Inverashet and dine at Carnoustie Castle.

He liked big people, and the Carnousties were quite big enough people to satisfy him entirely. Not a word had been said in the notes which had passed between the young men about the neighbours or about the neighbourhood at all, and Redwood had enjoyed the first disappointment occasioned by his casual remark, 'I have only one house to visit at,' followed as it was by the undisguised delight of hearing what that house was.

He felt contemptuously amused, he himself cared so little for grandeur as grandeur, or rank as rank; and had not Lord and Lady Carnoustie and the young ladies exactly happened to suit his mood, when he came across them, he might never have held them of the slightest account.

For Redwood had been accustomed to people of all sorts, and was at home in many a noble mansion. It was not because he had seen so little, but because he had seen so much of the world, that he was the simple mannered man he was. He had grown to hate a great deal that he saw, and the longer he lived the more he desired to live differently from those among whom his time so far had been chiefly passed.

In losing Miss Duberly he had had a lucky escape, but it would have been too much to expect him to see this while still smarting from the indignity of such a wound.

'Your hair is turning grey, Redwood.' Felix Merriman never minced matters.

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'Is it?' said Redwood, indifferently.

'Lucky for you, you are out of our beastly place.' The speaker had succeeded to Redwood's post. 'You would have been an old fellow in a few years.'

'I have no objection.'

'Oh, I don't mean anything offensive. You are a good-looking chap, and whether you are grey or green, it don't signify. Whenever anything is said about you, Redwood, I always stick up for you. I say, "He 's an uncommonly good-looking chap, if he's *not* a lady's man"' — the speaker broke off short, feeling what he had implied. There was an awkward pause, and another topic was introduced.

The slip, however, was not without its result. 'I may not be a lady's man,' said poor Redwood to himself, 'I suppose I am not. I can't talk their talk; and Mary Duberly said I was the worst dancer she has ever come across, but some women don't seem to mind me. I get along very well with Mina Carnoustie and Penelope East.'

And a faint desire to show himself in the company of these girls, with whom he was now quite at ease, made him offer less opposition than before to Merriman's entreaty when it again arose, to be taken to Carnoustie Castle at the luncheon hour. He felt that he would really like Felix to see him there.

CHAPTER XXIX.

TORQUIL MACALISTER TAKES THE HINT.

A MOST provoking thing had happened, according to Lord Carnoustie. He had lost one of his best servants — one of the best servants ever man had — at the most unfortunate time of the year.

Mr. Soutter ought to have prevented Torquil Macalister's leaving. It was all very well for Mr. Soutter to allege that he knew nothing of it — he ought to have known. What was the

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use of having a factor, if he were worse than useless as regarded what was going on under his very nose? One might as well keep a dog and bark for oneself.

Torquil Macalister was as amenable to reason as anyone, and would have been talked over in no time if Soutter had had the sense to talk to him. Poor Torquil! Poor fellow! He meant no harm; he thought he was doing right; the best of creatures Torquil always was!

But Mr. Soutter should have heard of the summons, and found the shepherd instantly — someone, anyone would have told him where Torquil Macalister was likely to be — and Soutter should have denounced in the strongest terms the folly and ingratitude of running off all in a moment, and leaving Lord Carnoustie in the lurch. Had he done so, Torquil would never have dreamed of going off, as he had done.

'Is he actually gone?' demanded Lady Carnoustie, little less affronted than her lord.

'Actually gone. Gone before break of day, by the six o'clock boat, and no chance of catching him. No one seems to know where he has vanished to. He left a message for me with Davie Cameron, to the effect that his father was dying — or some such nonsense ——'

'My dear Carnoustie!'

'Well, well, you know what I mean; you needn't be so *snack;* I can't stop to pick my words when I'm worried like this. We relied on Torquil for odd days on the moors, as well as for his shepherding; and he had promised to manage it and seemed to like the idea. With a keeper short already, it is positively heart-breaking to have a blow like this,' with all the gloom of a kindly despot, unaccustomed to being thwarted; 'I don't blame Torquil, but I do blame Soutter.'

'There you are wrong, Carnoustie ——'

'I am *not* wrong, I tell you. You always take Soutter's part.' He was now in the mood in which no one could deal with him. 'Soutter's well enough; but he is as thick-headed as a plum-pudding about a thing like this. Letting a fellow like Torquil Macalister go, as if he were a mere ghillie boy!'

'I am sure Mr. Soutter would have prevented it, if he could.'

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'And what was to prevent *him* then? Why did he not?'

'You yourself say that he knew nothing of the matter. No one knew of Torquil's intentions, I understand.'

'Isn't that what I am telling you? He *ought* to have known. What good is it for Soutter to come to me with a long face, "I have bad news for you, my lord,"' mimicking — 'when he has done nothing to prevent the "bad news"?'

'He cannot be in every place at once.'

'I never asked him to be in every place at once.'

'He was up here, with you.'

'And who wanted him to be up here, with me? I am sure *I* didn't. I was sick to death of his blethering; tormenting me with silly trifles I did not care two straws about; when all the while this, that really is of the greatest importance, is allowed to take place without a finger being lifted to stop it!'

Presently he owned that he had sent the worthy Soutter away 'with a flea in his ear.'

Soutter's suggestions and condolences had only inflamed his sense of the magnitude of his loss, and he had given vent to his irritation pretty freely.

Penelope had expected it all: she had presided over the note which her cousin's faltering fingers had penned the previous evening, and had herself handed it over to Torquil Macalister at the appointed trysting-place in the glen; meeting his look of amazement and alarm by the brief intimation that his departure must be immediate and unannounced.

He had not said a word, nor offered a syllable of remonstrance.

The young lady had withdrawn as quickly as might be from the scene, half afraid of the bold, strong, untamed nature whom she had dared to brave, and not a little relieved to find that he never stirred a step in pursuit while she flew swiftly home.

Mina, eager to know what had been said and done, found that her cousin had nothing to say. She had seen Torquil waiting, had rushed at him with the note, bidden him depart the next day and as secretly as possible, and rushed away again. 'I hated it altogether,' Penelope added, drawing a deep breath in conclusion.

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Then she began to prattle about Redwood and his friend, who had stayed most of the afternoon. Somehow the thought of them made the recollection of Torquil Macalister especially distasteful. She did not want to hear or to think any more of him; she detested the memory of his dark, handsome face — lacking as it was in expression and refinement — and of his splendid figure disguised by its coarse, ill-fitting clothes. Clothes are nothing, of course, but still, a man's coat should not hitch up in the middle of his back. Whenever Penelope thought of the rustic swain, she always saw a coat which would thus hitch, and a hat which all the classical outline of his features could not excuse.

The coat and the hat were reserved for Sundays, when Macalister designed to pass for a gentleman; on week days he looked much better.

But even on week days it was a marvel to Penelope how her cousin, and a cousin some years her senior, could have so forgotten herself. How could she — how *could* she?

The sense of an odious background, which was to be obliterated from the picture as speedily as possible, made her now place the figures of Redwood and his friend prominently before Mina's eyes; and she dwelt upon their appearance and agreeability at such length and with such impressiveness, that at length she did succeed in rousing some faint show of interest in her companion.

'Yes, I like Mr. Redwood very much,' said Mina. 'I ——' she hesitated.

'You wish you had met him long ago?' hinted Penelope. A new and glorious idea was taking possession of her breast.

'That, it would be presumptuous to suggest. He might have liked me then; I don't know; but at any rate he can never be anything to me now.'

'Why not, I should like to know?'

Mina looked at her reproachfully.

'Well, why not? I say, and say again, why not? I am not going to know of, or listen to, or recall any reason for that look. You are not to throw away all your chances of a happy and suitable marriage because you have played the fool ——'

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'Dear Penelope, don't.'

'I won't then, only you must promise me a "Don't" in return. Don't go and brood over this despicable episode, and fancy yourself still infatuated with this trumpery fellow, to your own hurt. Forget it, dear. Forget it as fast as you can. And you will do this more quickly if some one else — what do you say to this Merriman ——?'

'Penelope, you are absurd.'

Penelope laughed. Then she blushed. Then she looked at her cousin keenly.

'Any fault to Redwood?' she observed, twirling a rose between her fingers.

When Mina had replied, and for some time thereafter, she was thoughtful and nearly silent.

Next morning the two learned, through the medium of Lord Carnoustie's complaints, that Penelope's mission had been efficacious, and that Macalister, realising the strength of the forces against him, had surrendered to fate, and quitted the island at early dawn.

To Penelope this was a fresh source of triumph, and she was now as dangerously elated and self-satisfied as she had formerly been cast down and miserable. She had explained the scene in Ailsie's bedroom to the old nurse in this wise: Mina had displeased her, made her very angry indeed; so angry that she could not speak about it; and she had meant to get Ailsie to remonstrate with Mina on the subject; but catching her cousin eavesdropping, she had determined to have it out with her then and there.

On the enormity of eavesdropping she had expatiated in order to draw off Ailsie's attention from the real point at issue; this wonderful wile, evolved with a sense of profound diplomacy, had apparently met with the success it merited. Ailsie had nodded her head, made a few vague responses, and let the matter pass. Penelope felt in spirits for anything.

What more could she do for Mina? Mina, it was clear, could do nothing for herself — nothing, at least, that were not better left undone. She must be taken in hand. Kindly treated, she would prove docile as a timid deer, and now that

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she had learned to look upon her cousin as a friend, she might be guided for her own happiness.

Well, then, Redwood? Whichever way Penelope turned, Redwood's figure rose before her eyes. In vain she pooh-poohed it, pushed it aside, grew quite peevish with herself on the subject; the answer to every question regarding the past and future was — Redwood.

Yet why should Mina be married at all? Marriage was not necessary to a woman; far from it. Penelope had long declared against it on her own account, except when in the mood to jest, as when she told inquisitive old Ailsie she meant to have Redwood for herself.

But no one could have misapprehended that laughing utterance. When serious, my heroine always alleged that she was cut out for an old maid; and that she meant to be one, and a merry one. Of a good fortune she was secure; also of good health, bright spirits, energy, enterprise, and troops of friends. For the present she was content as she was; for after years she had a thousand projects. She would travel all over the world; settle here and settle there, and sip the sweets of every transition. She would see with her own eyes all the glorious sights whereof as yet she had only read and heard.

Also this queer little damsel had her visions of benevolence; though whether these were to lead her into the paths trod by such pioneers as the noble Howard and Elizabeth Fry, or of uniting the joys of adventure to the conversion of the heathen, like Moffat and Livingstone, or of sailing to the Deep-Sea Fisheries, and distributing good food, clothing, and literature 'norrard of the Dogger,' or of stirring, active missionary work in some original guise as yet unknown, remained undecided. She did not mean to be a hospital nurse; nor did she fancy the 'East End.'

One thing was clear, whatever line her philanthropy was ultimately to take, it did not require the aid of a husband; and Penelope, from having already seen and tacitly rejected a considerable number of problematical husbands, was really not far wrong when she assured herself that she was not a marrying girl.

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She was well off in her home; and, like the sensible little woman she was, realised that her sole remaining parent, even though he might not be very much of a father, still had some claims upon his only daughter. Mr. East, like a large number of his fellow-men, was a self-worshipper; and as long as all went well with him, was fully equal to the task of ministering to the necessities of his god: he plied himself with every good the world could give, and needed no assistance in his congenial task: still, a time might come — and, anyhow, Penelope was not prepared to quit her home just yet, either for marriage, or for anything else.

That being the case — Redwood? What was to be done with Redwood? He was too good to be wasted. He was not a very bright man; sometimes he was oppressively dull and sombre; and on the two first occasions of their meeting he had been rude; but, on the other hand, the rudeness had been amply atoned for, and she could not remember that he had ever been dull when alone with her.

It was when in the general circle that he was subject to absent fits. He would on a sudden draw himself in, answer shortly or not at all, and be *distrait* and uncommunicative for the remainder of the visit.

Could it be that he was a man with a story?

If so — if this were the explanation — what more fitting than that he should mate with Mina Carnoustie, who also had a story, and to whom such a termination of it would be a godsend?

Redwood on his first arrival had certainly seemed to admire Mina; and Mina, but for her unfortunate predilection in favour of another, would most likely have been pleased to be distinguished. She had all but owned she yearned for some one — any one — to care for her, and rescue her from the deadly monotony of her life.

'To be sure she did not show off on that first occasion,' laughed Penelope. 'A more anxious, puzzled, miserable face I never saw, when Redwood was doing his best to be civil to her and uncivil to me. But she improved; and now they are quite good friends. He is cooler than he was — she less cold. Would it be possible to warm him up into —— ?' Then she paused, but resumed after

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a minute. 'I think it would, and it shall. *I* will do it; I will make the match. He may not admire me, but he likes me; and I think I have some sort of power over him. He is not a clever man, but he is pretty prompt to divine what I mean sometimes. While the others are all sitting looking at me in their cow-like way, Mr. Redwood will rise up with that dry smile of his, and saunter off to do the thing I want. I like that. If I ever felt inclined to like a man, this dry, unimpressionable man would have as fair a chance as anyone I have yet seen, — though whether he would value such a chance or not is doubtful. We suit each other; we neither of us crave for more of the other than we have got — or at any rate can get. I am willing to present my cousin with him, — and that is something of a test, as every one will allow. Now to see if he is willing to be so presented. It will be rather a business; it will require some steering and prodding; I shall have to make little dabs at him, and little dabs at her, by turns; I shall have to coach them both. Let me see; I must think this matter over, in order to be well up in my own part. What a pity there is no work on the subject! "The Art of Match-making;" it would be of incomparable value to Miss Penelope East at the present moment. She has two rather ticklish customers to manipulate, and not much experience to fall back upon. The only thing to be said on the other hand is, that general rules are seldom worth much when it comes to the practical point. What general rule, for example, would provide for a back view of a romance like Mina's? It was an ugly, foolish romance — but still a romance. And what general rule, I ask again, would apply to a whole family so blind and dense and eaten up with pride and self-sufficiency as the whole lot of these Carnousties? Not to see that they had soured the girl, and set her lying! Poor Mina; it was really a touching little story, that first one of hers! And what brutal stupidity to treat her so!' A pause. 'Of course she ought to have spoken out; but, to be sure, speaking out might have done no good. I wonder why that Etheridge man was snubbed?' musing. 'Perhaps they had heard something bad of him? They would hardly have been such fools as to give him his *congé* without some reason which was a reason in their eyes, whatever it might

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have been in the eyes of other people. But at any rate, they ought to have told Mina that there *was* a reason, if they did not choose to say what. I should have been simply furious if it had been me. To *dare* to shut her up, and send him away, and never so much as say why!' her blood boiling. 'To *dare* to treat a girl of twenty like that! Why, she was my age! Quite grown up! And to be made a mere baby of! Well, poor despised Mina has served them out, anyway; and, my conscience, she would have served herself out too, but for me. I can't think of it without a "grue,"'—(Penelope never let an expressive term pass without getting Lord Carnoustie, who was an authority, to explain it, and it would infallibly be in use on the next occasion which offered.) 'Now I have got to take the poor thing under my protection, or we shall have another proper and promising marriage simply *botched*,' proceeded our matchmaker with her most businesslike air. '*I* see; I see how to do it. Never a hint do I let fall to anyone — trust me for that — but I will work, and watch, and mount guard, and, oh, glorious! divert the attention of these idiotic parents into another channel. They shall think it is the friend — the new-comer — the chattering Merriman who is going to do them the terrible damage of making up to their daughter! Yes, that is what they must be made to think,' laughing heartily. 'Why not? I am not doing anything to be ashamed of. I know the silly old creatures like Mr. Redwood, and, as they would say, "approve of" him. If they did not, it would be another story. But I can tell by their simple old faces that they really are keen, only they don't want anyone to see it. They are right enough there. No one wants them to *go for* the man, — but then the odds are that they will fly to the other extreme, and go dead against him, unless they are held in hand. *That* is what I have got to do. Feign to see nothing — but watch everything. Be ready always to step forward when things are getting mixed, and straighten them. Praise Mina to Redwood, and Redwood to Mina; and give each to understand (but this will have to be done with an uncommonly light touch, Penelope East; mind that, and don't be coarse) — still you might just insinuate, as opportunity offers, to one or other of the dear young people, that the other is, in

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a mild way, an object of interest to the one whose ear you have got. That will work, I fancy. . . . And I can dodge round Mina so as to make her walk next him and sit next him; she would never be quick enough to circumvent me, even if she should see — which I doubt her doing; and I can beguile them into the garden after dinner; we could all three go, and I could leave them there, and slip in for my shawl, and never return, and — oh, there are all sorts of ways in which we could progress, with a little skill on my part. And if you, my good Lord and Lady Carnoustie, attempt to put a spoke in *this* wheel, and think you are going to ride rough-shod over poor Mina a second time, you will find she has a champion who is not so easily disposed of, and with whom you had best not meddle. I give you warning, good people; and if you disregard it, then here's for a fair field and no favour.

'Hi, uncle Carnoustie, hi! Where are you going? I'm coming with you. Wait for me,' flying after the stumpy grey figure which came into view at the moment. 'Are you going to the Soutters'?' demanded Penelope, coming up breathless and tucking her hand into his arm. 'Come along, then. I'm coming to the Soutters' too.'

CHAPTER XXX.

A HAND ON A DOG'S HEAD.

Lord Carnoustie was very well pleased to have a companion on his Soutter expedition. He was on one of his *peccavi* visits, and was even more sheepish and penitent than usual, feeling that he had never rated the worthy Soutter more uncompromisingly than he had done that morning.

He now foresaw himself doomed to a good hour of penance and he really did not grudge the penance; his kind heart was smiting him severely, and would give him no peace till he had eaten and drunk to suit the sisters' most rapacious demands, and

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till in return he had administered to them as many encomiums on their idolised brother as they could swallow at one time; — but he was glad to have his humble pie made a little more palatable by the presence of Penelope.

He had a liking for Penelope. His eyes would twinkle merrily and a little amused quirk would flicker about the corners of his mouth when she attacked him and battled with him.

His own girls never showed fight, and the fight his wife did show was not like Penelope's. Penelope's was stimulative, exciting, mirthful — altogether pleasant. Lady Carnoustie's was either flavourless or worse. A man does not find it entertaining to be coldly rebuked, or fretfully called to order; but a brisk contest with a laughing, provoking maiden, who does not mind what she says, yet who never says anything really amiss, is a different experience. Lord Carnoustie's daughters used to sit by wondering silently while papa and Penelope ran full tilt at each other. They saw that papa did not mind it, and that even mamma was quiescent (for somehow nobody could resist Penelope's artless sunshine, and Lady Carnoustie, when she found that she could turn upon her young visitor and snap her up, and yet that Penelope would bear no malice, was disposed to make allowances for a 'London girl'), and this state of things was new to Louisa and Joanna.

Sometimes they would themselves essay a mild 'Oh, Penelope!' when Penelope to their view was really over bold. But they presently discovered with surprise that the remonstrance would not be backed up by dear mamma. Dear mamma had been known actually to take part with the offender.

'Penelope is not like one of you,' she had observed on one occasion. 'She is a guest — a visitor; one should not be always finding fault, even if she does occasionally overstep the bounds of decorum. She means no harm. Your father quite understands that she means no harm.'

Either Lord Carnoustie did, or else he liked the harm. Certainly he liked to hear himself hailed when off on what used to be a solitary tramp before Penelope came, by a joyous shout of 'Wait for me!' and to be saddled with a companion willy-nilly; a companion who never suggested 'By your leave,' or supposed

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for a moment that her presence could by any possibility be unwelcome.

He had felt rather oddly the first time Penelope inserted her small tenacious hand within his arm, and walked him about thus before the eyes of his people.

Yet he had not liked to ask to have the little hand — it was such a confiding little hand — taken away. He had merely stolen a furtive glance towards the castle windows to see whether anyone were looking out, and suggested to Penelope to run in and he would follow, when a gardener appeared in the way, on the return of the two from their ramble.

Penelope, without an idea of why she had been sent on, did as she was bid, humming a tune; and the next time she went for a walk with her elderly relation took his arm as a matter of course. She had been used to hang on to her father, and Mr. East, though not a doting parent, did not mind it. It never occurred to her that what was scarcely perceived by the one should be a novelty of importance to the other.

Then by-and-by the old lord got accustomed to his new appendage, and felt rather proud of it than otherwise when he encountered Redwood or Mr. Soutter. He would stand chatting willingly, and would say, 'Well, good day; come along, Penelope,' at the close of the interview, with a motion that was almost a proffer of the arm she had released; and once Redwood, on looking round to call a dog to heel, had seen the merry girl jogging the said arm back and forwards with vigour, apparently to enforce the point of some gibe at which both were laughing; and feeling rather lonely and dull himself, he had not wondered at Lord Carnoustie's evident partiality for such a comrade.

'You are going to make it up with the Soutters, aren't you?' said Penelope, marching alongside now. 'I guessed as much. You always do, don't you?'

'Make it up with the Soutters!' ejaculated he. 'Bless my soul, what nonsense! "Make it up," indeed! And with John Soutter, my own factor!'

'You said yourself you had been rather down upon him, uncle Carnoustie. And I know you always do go there when-

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ever you have been down on him. That was how I guessed where you were off to now.'

'Hoots! Rubbish! "Down on him," indeed! Much you know about it! "Down" on John Soutter, indeed!'

But he did not deny that he was bound for Glenmore.

'You know you think a lot of Mr. Soutter,' said Penelope, holding on to his arm and keeping step. 'But of course you must have your scold out every now and then; only you don't want him to be unhappy about it afterwards. That's it, isn't it?'

'Unhappy? I don't suppose he would be unhappy.'

'Yes, you do; you know he would. Your favour is the very breath of his nostrils; and he will be going about all to-day hanging down his head because you have been rating him; but it will be all right to-night when he comes home.'

'I dare say I was a little sharp with him.'

'And all because of a man not fit to lick his shoes! I never cared for Torquil Macalister, uncle.'

'What can you know about Torquil Macalister? He did not come in *your* way; he had nothing to do with *you*. You "never cared for Torquil Macalister," indeed! Set you up for a judge!' — laughing in spite of himself, — 'how can a little goose like you know whether Torquil was a good shepherd or not?'

'I said nothing about him as a shepherd; I did not like himself.'

'Himself? Oh, a man in Torquil's position has no "himself" for you and me. That's for his own people to judge about. I only speak of him as I found him; a very good servant, and a credit to the place.'

'Did he never seem to you rather — impudent?'

'Torquil impudent? Never. What put such a notion into your head? I suppose he stopped your going over the moor when the birds were sitting? — but you were not here then. Do you mean that he was not civil and obliging? The girls always told me they found him particularly willing to do anything. Mina used to say she could send Torquil flying to the world's end for her at a word.'

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Penelope thought it best to be silent.

'I never heard a complaint of Torquil on that score before,' pursued Lord Carnoustie, after a few minutes' pondering on the new idea. 'And I have never had a complaint to make myself. What ails you at him, of all people in the world — setting up your little pipe?' half amused, half affronted.

'I like people to keep their places,' said Penelope, sturdily.

'Troth, and so do I, and so, for that matter, does her ladyship. We have all to keep our "places" with her,' and his expression became still more humorous. 'It is as much as *my* place is worth not to keep it, I can tell you. But Lady Carnoustie never said either Yea or Nay about Torquil Macalister; and, between ourselves, that's as much as anybody gets from her — without it's John Soutter, who has crept up her sleeve; and I'm sure it's the comfort of my life that he has [illegible] hear how short she took me up this morning about [illegible] maybe I was rather unreasonable; I won't say I was not. ' one thing I know; it is the very best turn I can do Soutter to be angry with him to your aunt. The more I "flyte," the more she defends him.'

Penelope nodded.

'I know.'

'Soutter is as good a fellow as ever lived, but a tiresome, plaguey man; always in a stew about things going wrong that have no inclination to go wrong; and vanishing out of sight when he might be really of use,' and he proceeded to enlarge.

Penelope saw that it would be useless to try and lessen his regrets; time would do that; and she reflected that meanwhile it might perhaps be as well that he should openly proclaim what he felt, so long as he did it only to his own family and the factor's. She would try to keep him out of the way of other people — the country people, for instance — until the affair had blown over, and there was no chance of anyone's looking at him significantly; for she could not but fear that what had been going on for so many months must at some time or other have attracted notice; and even supposing no one had detected the extent of her cousin's folly and Macalister's pre-

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sumption, remarks might have been made which in time would have penetrated even Lord Carnoustie's skull.

'I'll just toddle about with him wherever he goes for a while,' quoth Penelope to herself, 'and hear all there is to hear, and turn aside anything there is to turn.'

Since she had turned Torquil Macalister out of his situation, it seemed to her she could turn anything.

The walkers were now approaching Glenmore, and Lord Carnoustie peered anxiously about.

'You don't want to encounter Mr. Soutter, do you?' said Penelope, who read everything as in a glass. 'I don't *think* you need be afraid.'

'Hoots! Afraid! But it might be as well if — they might take it as more of a compliment if — of course I can see Soutter about anything and I dare say the good ladies would prefer to have him to themselves — just tell me if that man over there,' pointing with his stick, 'that's not him, is it, Penelope? I thought he was to be over at the other side of the island this afternoon;' slackening his steps without being aware of doing so.

Penelope felt mischievous.

'We need not go in just yet, if it is he. We can go down to the shore, and sit on a rock; or along the road, and drop stones over the bridge. We can pass the time somehow till Mr. Soutter is out of the way.'

'Ay, we can do that. Which shall it be? Shall we come along the road?'

'Then what if he should come along the road himself presently?'

'You're right; he might; it would be just like him. Come down to the shore, then,' hastily. 'The tide is on the turn, and we can sit and enjoy the view.'

But Penelope had no inclination for the view, and no intention of being dragged down to the shore.

'Now that I see more plainly, it is not Mr. Soutter at all,' said she. 'And I was about to tell you, my dear uncle, that Mr. Soutter went by in his gig at a furious pace fully an hour ago; and I saw him vanish in the far distance, as I happened to be on the point of the headland.'

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'And why could you not have said that before?'

'Only to tease you a little!' and his arm was archly jogged about, and a laughing face was perked up into his.

When Lady Carnoustie emphasised her whispers by a pressure of the fingers, it hurt, or her husband said it hurt him, and he would testily demand what he was being pinched for; but it is notable that to Penelope's hearty shake he took no umbrage.

'I knew you were frightened to death lest old John should be in the way,' she ran on fearlessly. 'So was I. It would have been so stiff, so awkward. We could not have got out our little jokes at all. And we are going to tea, you and I. Jean and Marianne will think it bliss untold to have us at tea; indeed, if John has faithfully reported this morning's conversation, they will be expecting it. Does he tell them, do you think?' She broke off suddenly.

'Certainly not. Soutter is not such a fool. Besides, it would be highly dishonourable.'

'All right. "Not such a fool" is good enough for me. Then the Misses Soutter will be all the more enchanted with this joyful surprise. Come along, and we will have a merry meeting.'

'But who could the man have been? I distinctly saw a man.'

'Some fisherman,' said Penelope, hastily.

She also had distinctly seen a man, and she did not think it was a fisherman. When the two were ushered into the parlour, it hardly surprised her to have to shake hands with Mr. Redwood.

Nor did the meeting displease her companion. To Redwood he could adroitly expatiate on the virtues of John Soutter, with perhaps even more ease and success than to the sisters whom it was his object to please. He had said the same things so many times over to them, that to have a novel element introduced into the little drama would be an agreeable diversification; and, moreover, it would be doubly, nay, trebly gratifying to his hostesses to have the visit paid and the encomiums bestowed in the presence of two witnesses. He sat down in his accustomed chair, prepared for anything.

Redwood on his part had also made his observations.

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He had just reached the summit of the little rising on which the factor's domain was perched, intending to have a word about some fishing tackle which Mr. Soutter had promised to procure for him, when he caught sight of Lord Carnoustie approaching, with a petticoat by his side.

For a moment he felt a little confused by the sight, but not for one moment did he doubt to whom the petticoat belonged. Not only was Penelope several inches shorter than any of her cousins, but she was the only one who ever hung on in girlish, coaxing fashion to the old greybearded baron's arm. Redwood had often quietly thought it was a pretty sight, that of the weather-beaten oak with its ivy tendril; and his heart owned a curious sensation as he now perceived it, and perceived that he might either escape or be caught, as he chose.

Why should he escape? Felix Merriman was not by to see. He had certainly told Felix Merriman that in respect of the two fair damsels at Carnoustie Castle he might attach himself according to his taste, for that the field was clear for either; and as certainly Felix would have cried out that it was not fair play had he known of the present irresolution within Redwood's breast; but then Felix was an ass! His friend deliberately entered the factor's house.

The Misses Soutter were now in all their glory. Here was their honoured patron, of whom John had such a high opinion (John was a careful man), well seated back in the arm-chair he always took on these state occasions, with obvious intention of remaining there for a good long afternoon's visit; and here was young Mr. Redwood (so polite of that young man to call again within a month!) occupying the arm-chair opposite; and here was that dear child, Penelope, to keep the talk going, and prevent anyone's feeling neglected if Miss Jean should just run out to see that the kettle was caught precisely on the boil for Lord Carnoustie's tea, because Katie always would either lift it off the fire before it boiled properly, or else wait till it had been puffing away for ever so long, while she clattered in and out with the tea-tray. Servant-girls never could remember that tea-trays could wait, but making tea could not; and accordingly Marianne, good soul! could fold her hands in peace, and sit before

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his lordship reverently listening to his talk of the countryside, which, sooth to tell, they both knew plenty about, and knew also that not an iota was devoid of interest to the talker himself, while Penelope kept Mr. Redwood from feeling out in the cold.

'You would not come into the parlour last time I was here,' said he. 'You went and hid yourself in the kitchen.'

'I cannot do that to-day. This is a state visit.'

'You would if you could?'

'I did not say so. No, I don't think I should. I am not in the humour. I have come here for something different. Mr. Redwood, are you a believer in second sight?'

'Explain, and I will believe, or not.'

'Listen, then; I shall make a prediction, and you mark the consequences. I predict that within the space of the next five minutes my uncle over there will begin to laud somebody who is absent up to the skies, and *that* although only this morning he called that somebody "as thick-headed as a plum-pudding."'

'What?' said Redwood, laughing.

'There — there he goes!' cried Penelope in an excited undertone. 'Do you hear him? "Your most worthy brother for whose opinion I have the highest respect;" I knew it! I knew he was aching to have it out! I knew he could hold in no longer.'

Redwood, still laughing, glanced across the rug.

'You must know,' continued his informant, whose voice was swallowed up in the louder tones of the other pair, 'that Lord Carnoustie has periodical fits of indignation, when his good Soutter has a bad time of it. Directly the fit is over, he stumps up here and applies the healing balm, to be filtered through the injured one's relations. This morning Mr. Soutter caught it hot — very hot. My lord was still irate when he came in to luncheon; but for the past hour or two he has been on the fidget; and I, watching from afar, knew when I saw him setting forth from the front door, that the moment of reparation had come. You have no idea what a good man he is, Mr. Redwood; you really have not; he does not do himself justice.'

Perceiving she was serious, Redwood ceased to laugh.

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'Look at him now,' proceeded Penelope, in a still lower aside, while her eye kindled; 'see how he is trying to look pleased and glad at the sight of the tea-tray! If there is a thing he inveighs against, and as a rule abominates, it is afternoon tea; but he feels so kindly, and wishes to be so kind, that it really is no effort to exclaim "Ha! the tea-tray!" in that delighted voice. Sometimes I think none of us understand Lord Carnoustie, he has such funny little ways of showing when he is soft-hearted, and he does not like them noticed. But he is so good, when you see through and through him——' She checked herself, conscious of the impropriety of saying this to a stranger.

Redwood, however, only beheld the warm affectionate nature which betrayed itself by an impulse; and the hand which rested on the head of his dog.

Duke had followed his master into the house, and been permitted to remain at the hostesses' request; and he now sat in front of Redwood's chair, his huge black curly head on Redwood's knee, in an attitude of fond content. Penelope, vexed with herself for having been foolishly confidential, made matters worse by striving to hide her confusion in a caress of which she was scarcely aware, and the next moment was punished for it.

Redwood laid his hand on hers, and looked into her face.

Had he spoken she could have borne it better, but he said nothing, and she felt herself crimson to the brow as he looked.

He must have seen; he could not but see; and what could he think? She wished a hundred times, a thousand times, a hundred thousand times, she had let that detestable dog's head alone.

CHAPTER XXXI.

TOSH BRINGS A PIECE OF INFORMATION.

THE awkward moment however passed, as even the worst of moments must.

In almost less time than it takes to write it, Redwood had withdrawn his gaze and removed his hand, Penelope had rushed

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into the gayest of gay chatter, Lord Carnoustie had turned from Marianne Soutter, considering that he had given her as much of 'John' as she could stand for the time being, and the elder sister had announced that tea was ready.

All drew in their chairs; this was part of the proceedings.

But why did Penelope walk over to the opposite side of the little square table and endeavour to force an entrance between Miss Soutter and her principal guest? It was not her place to sit at Jean's right hand; and even Jean looked puzzled and put out, while Lord Carnoustie demanded, without hesitation: 'Hollo! What are *you* doing here? Go back where you came. What do you want my chair for?' in a manner that set everybody laughing.

Feeling foolish, and aware of the foolish blush still upon her face, Penelope had to get back as she could, and endeavour to revenge herself by a murmured aside: 'Did you see that, Mr. Redwood? My second sight predicted it all. He must sit between the two, and fill up the full measure of his penitence. Oh, no, thank you, the sun was not in my eyes; it was not that,' as he made a suggestion. 'Oh, it was nothing,' taking the seat he held out for her, and endeavouring not to seem disconcerted.

('This is a *true* nature,' said Redwood to himself. 'She went to avoid me, feeling a little small because she had been betrayed into "gush," and I showed I liked the "gush." I don't think any the worse of you for this, Penelope.')

Penelope, however, thought the worse of herself; indeed, she did not at all like the prospect of facing herself presently, when she should have to think over the scene. There must be no more of these confidences; they were just the kind of thing she most disliked and condemned in other girls of her age. How could she have been so ridiculous, so *missish?*

And of all people to choose Redwood — Redwood for whom she had designs so different!

In order to obliterate her absurdity from his recollection, she roused herself to be not only gay, but the promoter of gaiety in others; bantered and badgered the two old ladies till they cried with laughter; provoked Lord Carnoustie's geniality till he was

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not only graciously unbending, but positively silly; and unwittingly made herself more charming than ever in the eyes of a young man who had had no fault to find with her before.

'Well, we must be going,' said Lord Carnoustie, rising at last. 'I always like to get home by the time the post comes in, and I see old Posty hirpling along the road now. They tell me that they have lately started having two posts a day at the other side of the island, but I am sure I hope that won't come here, for think of it! — two posts! — we should never get away from our letters!'

'Considering that he has on an average one, or at most two, in each letter-bag!' commented Penelope to herself. These simple remarks of her old-fashioned kinsman always delighted her vastly.

'Well, good-bye, Miss Soutter,' continued the old gentleman, with his courteous bow and cordial hand. 'Very many thanks for your kind hospitality. I have had a most delightful tea, I assure you. I have spoilt my dinner in a manner I don't do every day. As for Penelope, she has eaten everything on the table ——'

'Uncle Carnoustie, what a shame!' Penelope's shrill girlish voice protested. 'What a shame! Miss Jean, have I? Do speak up for me, Miss Jean,' shaking her by the sleeve.

'Oh, you know, Penelope;' but Miss Jean could only giggle in lieu of partisanship.

'Well, come away, if you can walk after all that,' proceeded Lord Carnoustie, no whit recanting. 'Come away, and get rid of it. We'll get back to the house, and just see the letter bag, and then go for a walk.'

'Come for a walk first, uncle,' coaxing.

'It is a lovely afternoon,' observed Redwood.

'The walk first, eh? Oh, very well, I've no objection. We'll go along a bit this way. Will you come with us, Redwood?'

He had merely seen in the arrival of the post-bag a polite excuse for breaking up the party, and bringing the scene to a close with *éclat*. In reality he preferred the walk, and it did not at all surprise him that Redwood did the same. He and Redwood and Penelope always got along comfortably. They

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had had more than one tramp together, and suited each other as a harmonious trio.

The two gentlemen were to shoot together presently; not, of course, until after the first few days succeeding the 'twelfth,' but a day was fixed upon for the week following, and Lord Carnoustie owned that he could have wished Penelope had been a man to join the party.

Penelope did not see how being a woman made any difference. She could walk, if she could not shoot; she would like to go of all things; and she was beginning joyously to urge her claims, and the arguments by which all prejudices on the subject might be overcome, when she caught Redwood's eye, and was instantly silent.

Was this the way she was going to wipe out her lapse from decorum in Miss Soutter's parlour?

She bit her lip, and during the remainder of the walk was prim and proper enough for anybody.

When she went home, she told herself that she must set about making the match between Redwood and her cousin without delay, otherwise Redwood might be thinking thoughts he had no right to; might be harbouring all manner of tiresome, unfounded suppositions.

It was not as if she were a raw, ignorant girl; she had been about the world to a certain extent — enough, at any rate, to teach her what colour men were apt to put upon impetuous friendliness when exhibited towards themselves by marriageable young ladies. It would be too bad if Redwood were to imagine that she was throwing herself at his head: and as she had been so idiotically impulsive, and had made matters worse by confusion and blushes to boot, it behoved her to dispel any such notion.

Accordingly she planned her tactics with care.

The next time Redwood came to the castle he found himself unaccountably baulked of any desire he might have felt to attach himself to the side of the bright girl who was gradually winning him from his vexations; and in Penelope's place there was always the pale cousin who had been his first attraction.

He no longer cared for Mina. She palled upon him. She

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had nothing to say; no spirits, no wit, no spring; honestly he thought her dull, and having to talk to her a bore. But how to get out of a situation he had brought upon himself? He had resolutely selected the youngest Miss Carnoustie as the recipient not perhaps of attentions in the strict sense of the word, but of politeness; he had been wont to address her with inquiries betraying an interest in her concerns; and had informed her of his own. When relating an anecdote, he had got into the way of looking at Mina and carefully ignoring Penelope, of whom he was by fits and starts desperately afraid, and had been half angry with the intercepting laugh which would ring out sometimes, when the latter, always on the alert for the faintest semblance of a jest, would see the point of the tale almost before it was spoken, and force upon the narrator an appreciation of her quickness, as contrasted with that of the other.

It ought to have been Mina who laughed, and yet he could not help liking to hear Penelope laugh. He could not help being disarmed by it.

Still, he had had his intervals of distrust, and it was only now, only after the blithesome hour in the parlour at Glenmore, that he fairly brought himself to own that gaiety and vivacity were not the unfailing characteristics of a false and frivolous heart. That much allowed, could he help finding dulness insupportable?

The poor man was really to be pitied. He had set dulness on a pedestal and worshipped it. It had seemed to him the one thing to be desired in womankind. That a face should be fair and soft, a manner kindly and gentle, a smile reluctant — that was the *ultima Thule* of his aspirations; and as long as he was mentally on the sick list, Mina Carnoustie was precisely the proper sick-room pap required for his nourishment.

But he was now convalescent. As a matter of fact, he was regaining vigour with every day, and becoming again not only himself, but his best self, by leaps and bounds. He had always been a 'straight' man, a man with a perfectly pure and honourable nature, earnest, painstaking, steadfast. At one time he had cherished the thought of making for himself a great career, but perhaps his abilities were hardly on a scale to have made

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this possible. He had, however, abundance of common sense and good feeling, and it was said of him by those who knew, that he had an independence of thought which often made his opinion of greater value than that of far cleverer men.

One thing was certain; Redwood knew what he liked and, in a general way, what he wanted. He knew now that he was no longer disconsolate and irritable, out of sorts with his fellow-creatures at every point; in short, that he had had his fit of the blues, and come out of it.

That being the case, cheering was what he needed, not repressing. Mina Carnoustie was not a cheering girl — her cousin Penelope was. Accordingly, Penelope was the antidote to the past which wisdom prescribed. He did not think he should ever be again caught by a wily winsomeness of disposition, such as had entrapped him before, — but it was certainly lawful to get all the good he could out of it.

As to his having put his hand on Penelope's, well, it was foolish perhaps, but it was a mere spontaneous movement of approval, when he had been unable to say anything, and yet had been pleased with the little girl for speaking up so nicely. As for looking into her eyes? Pooh! Penelope must have understood. She was not thinking of matrimony any more than he was. With ordinary care, he might surely enjoy her society.

But he found that somehow or other he had less and less of the society to enjoy. A few days after the tea-party Redwood and his friend dined at the castle. Redwood had not dined there for some time, and now that he had a friend who could be invited also, Lady Carnoustie was pleased to issue an invitation. She was satisfied with Mr. Merriman. He had ingratiated himself with her by the simplest methods, and, being practised in the art of propitiating dowagers, had almost wondered at the ease with which he had obtained her favour.

She had actually brought out her harp, tuned it, and mended the broken strings, because Mr. Merriman's mother had played the harp; and he had been quite affected by the sight of one, and had begged touchingly to be allowed to hear anyone play the harp again. He had found his way by himself to the castle, and dutifully sat by applauding and selecting, the while

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Redwood was supposed to be looking after his fishing tackle at the factor's cottage; and the invitation to dinner was his reward.

'I get on with them first-rate,' he confided to his friend. 'Nice, quiet people, and uncommonly friendly. The young one — your one ——'

'She is not my one.'

'All right. She's a nice girl; aristocratic, and all that sort of thing. The elder sisters are a trifle *passées*, but they are amiable, and give themselves no airs. As for the mother, she is quite the *grande dame;* but I knew how to manage her; and I flatter myself she is quite taken with me. Really, you are in luck, Redwood.'

Redwood turned contemptuously away. He understood that the fine place and the title had cast a glamour over every member of the family in the other's eyes; and while telling himself that the only two really worth notice as individuals in the whole party had been overlooked in the above encomium, forgot to remember that they had been absent when Merriman was bringing his observations to a point.

He was, however, quite willing that his friend should be pleased; the invitation to dinner was accepted, and on the following Tuesday the young men duly appeared.

They had not expected to find any guests beyond themselves, but, rather to Redwood's surprise, who by this time was versed in his neighbours' ways, when they were ushered into the great drawing-room at Carnoustie Castle, lit for the occasion, they beheld several fashionable-looking strangers, in whose honour obviously the state apartment had been put into requisition. Redwood had never been received in it before; it was too large for ordinary use; and he instantly divined that the guests who had caused such a divergence from the ordinary routine must be people of importance.

They were. They were Sir Robert and Lady Ainslie, Captain Ainslie, and Miss Alice Ainslie — the very Ainslies who had formerly been in such disgrace with their Carnoustie kith and kin that all relationly intercourse had come to a deadlock; but who, having now ceased to think any more about the little jar,

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which the intervention of six years had indeed caused to all but vanish from memory, had proposed a visit.

The proposal, indeed, had arrived in the very letter-bag which Lord Carnoustie had espied on old Posty's back from the Soutters' window; and he and Penelope had gone home to find the home-trio in a flutter.

The Ainslies wanted to come, and it was not in the Carnoustie code that anyone who wanted to come and had a claim to come, should be refused admittance to their stronghold.

They could put aside old college friends and ordinary acquaintances, but not a writer who owned the tie of blood. The Ainslies were but distant connections. And it was true that they had not been at Carnoustie Castle for years, and that the Carnousties had been at Robert's Tower last.

This latter consideration clinched the matter. To have been at a house — even though the stay therein had been marked by unpleasantness — and not to have returned the hospitality was bad enough, and could only have been excused by the nature of the circumstances; but to decline the proffer of a visit was absolutely impossible.

'And really she writes very politely,' quoth Lady Carnoustie, stroking her cap strings and turning the little perfumed sheet backwards and forwards in her fingers. 'It is certainly true that we have not seen anything of them for a long time, and we used to go regularly to Robert's Tower. I dare say they have often wondered why we ceased to go. Lady Ainslie has no delicacy of feeling, as we all know; doubtless she thinks it is a mere coincidence — and perhaps it is as well she should think so. I am not sorry either,' she added with a touch of grimness in her smile, 'that we can show that we do sometimes see *eligible* young men without needing to *encourage* them. I shall invite Mr. Redwood and Mr. Merriman to dine while the Ainslies are here.'

Throughout the next few days one would hardly have known the drowsy old domain.

Everything and everybody started into activity as though awakened from the sleep of ages. The servants without and within flew to make amends for past arrears of work undone.

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The gardeners and stablemen 'rushed' their work, and wondered to find how it had accumulated. The housemaids raked out every nook and corner of the remotest turrets. The cooks baked, boiled, and made ready cold compounds which might have feasted an army in a siege.

Nurse Ailsie was radiant. Even complaints of inadequate supplies of this thing and that, confessions of broken crockery which could no longer be hid, and sudden announcements of handles off doors, and broken panes in windows — which were sprung upon her in all directions — failed to bring a cloud to her brow.

Here at last was company, and company of the right sort. The massive silver dinner service, the lace-edged pillow slips, and the satin coverlids were not too fine now to be in use.

The chintzes must be taken off in the long drawing-room.

When she heard that there was to be further a dinner-party, even though the dinner-party was only to comprise three or four extra people, she lifted up her hands, and Penelope affirmed she exclaimed, 'Praise the Lord!'

Ailsie denied this, but she denied it with such a 'Hoot awa wi' ye, Miss Penelope,' as showed the slanderer was not far wide of the mark. 'Me! I said naethin' o' the kind,' protested the old woman, stoutly. 'Maybe I micht hae said "Praise,"' she added, after a pause, 'but I gat nae further, that I'll stand by. I was no thinkin', or I would na hae said sae muckle. I was that taen by surprise. If I said "Praise," that was a'; and it was naethin' mair than surprise that did it. Noo, dinna ye gang an' mak a story o' that, Penelope.'

Penelope had by this time so far advanced in favour as to share with her cousins the private use of her Christian name, without the prefix. She was now in the mood for a tussle, and had just lifted her voice to reply to the above, when there came a loud and yet uncertain tap at the outer door — one of the many outer doors in which the castle abounded — and both stopped to listen.

'It's Tosh,' quoth Mrs. Alison, astutely. 'I kenned he wad be here the day. Nae matter whaur he is, he feels the smell o' comp'ny food, an' he's here by nicht.' Then winking and

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blinking, 'I'm no gaun to let on that I hear him. He may tap till he's weary. Losh! what a noise! He kens I'm here, the impident loon!'

'Oh, let him in,' said Penelope.

'Let him in, the day? Na. I hae nae time for the likes o' him. There's your ain maid, she's been hinnerin' me half the time a'ready. She mun hae pincushions for the spare rooms.'

'Marie can make beautiful pincushions. Do let her make some.'

'Aweel, I gied her some pieces, and she can mak o' them what she pleases; but she's no to think we hae naethin' o' our ain. Oor rooms is as guid as ither fowks; but I said she could try, jist to pacify her. Hark to yon impidence!' as Tosh thundered away. 'Jist let him be, let him be; he'll sune weary o't, if we tak' nae heed. Miss Penelope,' hesitating, 'there was somethin' I had i' my mind when ye cam' in. It's aboot dinner-tables. Ye'll be seein' a mony gran' dinner-tables in London, and maybe they're different from what we hae here; whiles there's new ways o' dressin' them?' interrogatively. 'No that we need mind; but still, if so be as there was onythin' newer fangled — Hyslop an' me's auld-farrant — an' we wadna like to be behindhand for thae Ainslies. Is there onythin' ye can mind o'?'

'I'm afraid I never thought about it,' began Penelope, but meeting a look of disappointment, she paused, and ransacked her brains. 'I dare say I could arrange the flowers in a new way. I do remember one very pretty dinner-table I saw just before I left. Oh yes, Ailsie, I'll try my best.'

'That's a guid bairn. Jist try, or Hyslop he'll dump doon onythin', and think it looks michty fine; and Finlayson he'll send in a wheen great muckle stacks o' flowers, strappit as hard an' as ticht as a drum-major. I think naethin' o' their taste, neither t' ane nor the t' ither. But you jist tell them you are gaun to do it in a *new* way; they canna fin' faut wi' that; an' I'll see ye hae the best napery — oh, haud the tongue o' ye, canna ye?' as Tosh still plied his stick monotonously. 'I maun send him awa', or he'll be there a' day,' turning to her

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cupboard, and reappearing armed with a large slice of bread and jam.

Tosh, however, was not to be put off, even with bread and jam.

'Eh, let me come in and rest my banes, mistress. I hae come frae Inverashet, and the road's gey sair on a day like this. Let me sit doon a bit, and gie me a drap milk. I'll no hinner ye lang,' and he pressed past into the little parlour.

'What were ye aboot at Inverashet, Tosh?' Ailsie's curiosity was piqued, as the cunning idiot meant it to be. Tosh was perfectly aware that half his popularity in the countryside was due to a happy knack, which he had brought to much perfection, of playing tell-tale, or, as it is called in his part of the country, 'Tale-pat.'

He had picked up something at Inverashet which he fancied would not be unwelcome at Carnoustie Castle, and he was now paving the way for its reception, in order that it should not go too cheap.

'What was I doin'?' he repeated, indignantly. 'Makin' a freenly call. What mair wad I need to be doin'? Me and Redwood's freens; and he tell't me to look in i' the bye gaun. He was talkin' aboot yersels,' he subjoined, slily.

'No to you,' retorted Ailsie, with confidence. 'Gentlefolks doesna talk o' ilk ither to bits o' bodies like you, Tosh. It wad be wi' that ither gentleman.'

'An' what if it was?' rejoined Tosh, sulkily. 'I heard him. That was a' I wanted. He said — eh, what for are ye rinnin'?' to Penelope, who had turned towards the door. 'Amn't I gaun to tell ye what he said? Says he ——'

But Penelope raised her hand.

'Tosh, I am not angry with you, because you don't mean any harm, and you know no better. But you must not repeat to me what you overheard Mr. Redwood say. It is not right, Tosh, to listen to people and carry away their conversation.'

'Faix! he canna understan' that, Miss Penelope,' murmured Ailsie, aside. 'An' he'll no be hinnered o' doing it. We jist let him say his say. It's best to tak no heed o' onythin'.'

'Whatten's that ye're saying, mistress?'

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Tosh was regarding the two with lowering brows.

'Dinna vex him,' continued Ailsie in a whisper; 'he's raal crabbit when he's put aboot. Let him say his say, an' be dune wi' it.'

Penelope hesitated. At times she was still a little afraid of the burly idiot, perceiving that albeit not of a malicious nature, he was best left unprovoked; and, moreover, she was dying to hear what he had to tell; — but courage and honour won the day. Without a word she marched to the door.

'Aweel, you're no the ane, ye need na think it,' bawled Tosh angrily after her; 'Redwood's for your betters. It's the Carnousties he's to marry upon, and it's mysel' heard him say sae!'

The loud tones of his voice left no doubt as to the distinctness with which each word fell upon her departing ear as she turned away.

'I am sure I am very glad,' said she to herself with a little laugh, 'very glad.'

Then again, when a little further off, '*Very* glad.'

'This simplifies matters,' our matchmaker proceeded after yet another pause. 'It is a piece of valuable information. I should not have *listened;* but as Tosh gave me no choice, it is quite as well that I *heard.* Now, I know exactly what I am about. Those two men have been talking; and I dare say Mr. Merriman having chaffed Mr. Redwood about Mina, Mr. Redwood in his serious way has replied by confessing the facts of the case to Mr. Merriman. What luck that Tosh heard them! I suppose I ought not to say that — but all the same, it is. It is so very enlightening; so very inspiring; altogether I am so pleased. I shall work for this now, heart and soul; somehow I have been rather half-hearted about it this week. But now that I *know* — yes, indeed, Mr. Redwood, this news has given quite a fillip to my spirits, and your table decorations for the dinner-party shall be magnificent — but all the same, if I catch you bringing that *beast* of a dog about the place!'

She could not think of the big black head and the pathetic eyes without shrinking into herself.

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CHAPTER XXXII.

'A WEEK IS A CONFOUNDEDLY LONG TIME.'

IT is hard upon a man of means to become suddenly poor through no fault of his own, and every one who has undergone this revulsion of fate is sincerely to be pitied; more, he usually finds the world compassionate: but there is a gradation in the scale of misfortune which is apt to be regarded with indifference, and yet which is not without its sufferings to the victim.

When Sir Robert Ainslie, who had never been a wealthy man, but who had nevertheless lived in comfort as became his position during the greater part of his life, found that year by year he had less and less to live upon, and more and more need to cut down every expense, his friends and acquaintances made short work of his troubles.

They said he had only to do as his neighbours did — let his place, and go and live quietly somewhere else till the bad times were over, and the agricultural depression which had proved so unkind to the Scottish lairds, as well as their English neighbours, was a thing of the past.

This was all very easy to say, but it was by no means so easy to do. There were several preliminary stages to be passed through before anything could be done at all, and each one of those in the case before us was a lion in the path. Sir Robert had first to be talked over into thinking the idea a feasible one; he had then to be induced to adopt it; finally, he had to find his tenant. At the last, when he had become eager for this important piece to appear on his chessboard, tenants had been coy.

At length, however, Robert's Tower had passed for the time being into other hands, and the baronet and his family had been turned loose to graze in pastures new.

In the first rebound of feeling, consequent on having the matter settled, things had gone fairly well; but then had come

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a time when moving about from place to place was no longer a novelty; when letting the family estate was no longer a panacea for every ill; and when all the grievances of a proprietor who beholds from afar his own lands being lairded over and enjoyed by an interloper, were keenly felt.

Adversity, which as a rule brings out whatever good stuff there may be in a man, had no such apparent effect on Sir Robert Ainslie, perhaps because there was nothing in him to ennoble. He had been an amiable, he was now a peevish, nonentity. The loss of money simply made him unable to think of anything else.

Lady Ainslie may be described in still fewer words. She was a careless, kind-hearted woman of fashion, who, if she sometimes blundered when endeavouring to further the interests of her friends, at all events was just as maladroit and occasionally as unlucky when looking after her own.

It will be remembered that in her indignation regarding a certain episode, Lady Carnoustie had denounced her kinswoman as coarse and malignant. The latter term was unfair; the former perhaps was, in a certain degree, just. In fashionable circles the finer feelings are swiftly blunted; and one woman will say things of another, and assign to her motives and springs of action which revolt the more delicate ear, without malice and without at all comprehending the extent of the accusation; nay, the speaker probably does not see her own remarks in the light of an accusation at all.

Thus, when Joanna Carnoustie was adjured to bid her mother good speed in her implied readiness to receive a son-in-law, no harm was intended — but the contrary.

It may be safely affirmed that Lady Ainslie meant to do a good turn all round. She was gratified that her house had been the meeting-place for two young people who took kindly to one another; and even had nothing further been possible between them, would have enjoyed and furthered a flirtation. But when, as in the instance referred to, an engagement would have been approved of by both families, and when she would have been belauded far and near for bringing about the match, she might really have been pardoned for feeling anxious lest any doubts or

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misapprehensions on the part of the Carnousties should delay its speedy accomplishment.

The Carnousties, she argued, were so terribly respectable. It was all very well to be respectable, of course; and really the young men of the day were often quite too shocking: but when it had been Mina Carnoustie's extraordinary good fortune to attract a *perfectly* excellent, *absolutely* irreproachable suitor — and when everyone knew how rare such suitors were — it would be too provoking if poor dear Mina's stupid parents were to haggle about their consent.

She had tried to make them talk about Walter Etheridge, but they would not. She had tried to force it upon them that Walter was the best young man that ever lived, and they had only met her emphatic assurance by vacant stares, suggestive of an internal, 'What is that to us?' So that she had really felt quite nervous when the last day came, and none of the party seemed to see anything, and would, as likely as not, be taken altogether by surprise when Walter spoke out.

It would have been nice if Walter could have spoken out at Robert's Tower, but he had thought he hardly could do that on three days' acquaintanceship, although he had owned to being ready with his offer as soon as propriety admitted of his making it.

'Will he ever get the chance?' his hostess had wondered. She did not know the infinite resources of a man in love. She had heard Etheridge feeling his way, and noted in what direction he meant the war-path to lie. She had laughed to herself as she marked him drawing nearer and nearer to the archæological remains, and gradually enclosing them in his net, till she had scarce been able to refrain from a triumphant 'Bravo!' when Lord Carnoustie's lips had uttered the magic word, 'luncheon.'

In her excitement caution seemed no longer needed. She felt she must speak, or die for it; and the result had been her whisper on the doorstep.

How, and in what manner, or from what source had come the collapse, neither she nor any others ever knew; Etheridge had merely penned the briefest of notes, in which, without adverting

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to his blasted hopes, he informed his amiable confidante that he had spent an unsatisfactory hour at Carnoustie Castle, that he had seen only *some* of the party, and that he had not been invited to return thither after viewing the ostensible object of his visit. He was leaving Scotland, and, thanking her for her kindness, hoped they might meet in the south, later on.

'There! Did I not tell you?' exclaimed the unconscious perpetrator of all the mischief. 'Did I not tell you those wretched Carnousties would cut their own throats somehow?'

Consequent on this, a coolness had ensued between the families, which neither curiosity on the one hand, nor a desire to flaunt their triumph on the other, could overcome sufficiently to bring about a renewal of intercourse.

'I will not have her in the house!' cried the one lady.

'There is no pleasure in going to see such a simpleton!' protested the other.

But year after year had passed, and many things had happened. Family cares, sorrows, anxieties, the vicissitudes of health and fortune had almost obliterated any recollection of the whole affair from the minds of the people of the world; while Time of itself, unaided and unsupplemented, had softened and dimmed its outlines on the part of their rustic kinsfolk.

It was without heartburnings on either side that greetings passed on the arrival of the expected guests at Carnoustie Castle.

'Was that Etheridge's one?' inquired Captain Ainslie, as he strolled into his mother's room before dinner. 'That tall, fair girl in the blue frock.'

'Mina? Yes. But she is not as pretty as she was.'

''Jove! What a height she is! What girl was that they were talking of? Some girl they said was living with them.' (Penelope had not yet appeared.) 'Who is she, and what is she doing here?' inquired the young man next.

'Really, you will have to find that out for yourself. They all told me, but I did not listen to any of them.'

'Like you that, mother. I thought you looked rather sleepy. What scarecrows the old girls are! I don't wonder they have never found anyone to marry them. I say, they might have had some other people to meet us.'

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'They never do. There never is a soul at Carnoustie Castle. I was afraid you would find it dull, but your father had no other chance of shooting ——'

'All right. No more had I at present. But as I am here, I am sure to get asked to other places. People won't invite you unless you are actually in Scotland, for fear of your stopping too long, but if you can be carted on to your next quarters they are not so chary.'

'Do you think you could manage a week here, Bob?'

'A week?' Bob's face elongated. 'It would be a confoundedly long time,' he muttered.

'You see we have not many places on our visiting list this autumn; several are shut up that we used to go to. This is a comfortable house ——'

'Oh, it's a good enough billet. But a week! Hang it all! A week! You did not tell me you were going to let us in for a week, you know,' reproachfully.

'You can take yourself off if you find it insupportable, though I think you would be foolish to do so. You are in good quarters, with the prospect of good shooting.'

'No, ma'am, no.' Captain Ainslie shook his head. 'You are out there, ma'am. Not good shooting as men call shooting. I have interviewed the old gentleman on the subject, and my opinion is that the shooting is decidedly shady. He does not know what good shooting really means, he has rusted so long in this one place. Unless you go about from moor to moor you can't tell good shooting from bad.'

'At any rate, it is shooting of some kind, and you told me yourself you had no definite prospect of getting any unless you came with us ——'

'Ay, but people will ask me once I am set a-going. Besides, you said you would take me in tow, and I am depending on you.'

'And am I not doing all I can for you? I have brought you to this beautiful place during the very first week of grouse-shooting, and I heard Lord Carnoustie inviting you to go out on the moor to-morrow. Really, I think you are quite ungrateful,' concluded the speaker, not unreasonably aggrieved.

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But no one could ever succeed in putting Bob Ainslie in the wrong. He was possessed of the smoothest, thickest skin that ever protected mortal man from reproach or assault. He had no objection to anybody's finding fault with him, or being angry with him. If a lie were brought home to his door he would, metaphorically, step over it. In his regiment he was not disliked, for it would have been useless to dislike him; while his imperturbable good temper made him rather a pleasant companion than otherwise. But it was said of him that anybody who took his word about any mortal thing deserved to be swindled for being the greater fool of the two.

On the present occasion, the young man had agreed to put himself under the wing of his parents for a round of autumn visits, for the sole reason that he had nowhere else to go. He had neglected to provide himself with invitations — according to his mother; he was such a consummate ass that nobody would ask him — according to his father. Sir Robert and his wife differed in their estimate of their eldest son, and it must be confessed that Sir Robert had the world on his side.

'He can't even shoot, unless the birds are as thick as crocuses on the ground!' he was wont to aver; but even his rasping laugh when a shot missed failed to disturb the delinquent's equanimity.

'Ha! Missed? Better luck next time.' Bob would put in another cartridge, and join in the laugh.

The only thing he really minded was dulness, and in the present instance his soul foreboded dulness dire and unrelieved.

'The place is well enough,' he mused, 'but you must allow, mother, they are a rummy lot. I don't know how I'm ever to get along with them. If they had only had some pretty girls here that a fellow could talk to——'

'I dare say the cousin may prove to be pretty.'

'You say that to make me stay. She is sure to be just such another as themselves, and they are the queerest old girls; however, I dare say they are not bad when you get over their scragginess — I'll do my best. After all, it's beastly hard on them not to be married, and I dare say it is no fault of theirs that they're not. Mina is the best of the three,' meditatively.

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'Mina was a very pretty girl half a dozen years ago,' rejoined his mother.

'Tol-lol. She could never have been more than tol. She has no complexion, and her nose sticks out. She may look better by candlelight,' again meditating.

'She always did. We said so at Robert's Tower. She lit up wonderfully. And, poor girl, she looked so bright and happy in those days.'

'Not much of that left. I thought I had never seen a girl with a more hang-dog expression. And so we are to be a week here, are we? Well,' with a sigh, 'it will have to be worried through, I suppose. But remember, mother, before you commit yourself, a week is a confoundedly long time,' and he looked at her with an air of solemn admonishment. 'I would not say too much about it before you have had time to think it over. 'Pon my word, I can't for my part recollect ever stopping a week in one place, that is to say on a visit, in my life.'

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FASHIONABLE ARRIVALS.

PENELOPE had begged to be excused being present on the arrival of the Ainslies.

Busy with her plots and plans, and with all her thoughts intent upon the one subject, she had felt the appearance on the scene of fresh, lively, uninterested and uninteresting people a tiresome interruption, and been impatient of the endless discussions to which the projected visit had given rise.

Everybody had tried, moreover, to enlighten her, and make her curious and excited about the Ainslies. Even her aunt had begun in accents of formal condescension, 'You will naturally want to know who these Ainslies are, my dear Penelope,'—when she did not want in the least; and she had been obliged to listen, with the best grace she could, to lengthened details of

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genealogy which at no time would have been of interest, and were at the present crisis simply unendurable.

She had fared better with Louisa. Louisa had started conversation with, 'We are pleased that Alice Ainslie is coming, on your account, Penelope,' and been permitted to get no further. Penelope had turned upon her.

'Why upon my account?' she had demanded, almost fiercely.

'Did you not know? Did no one tell you?' Mild astonishment mingled with exultation in the speaker's accents. She could scarcely believe in her good fortune. It had actually been left to her to inform Penelope of the joyful surprise in store. 'Alice Ainslie is just your own age,' she said.

'Is that all?'

'All!' repeated Miss Carnoustie, confused by such a reception of her intelligence. 'Dear me! Why, really! Why, Penelope, I thought — we all thought that it would be so delightful for you to have a companion ——'

'Thank you, but I don't want a companion. Why should you suppose I needed a companion?' drumming with her foot upon the floor. (Internally, 'I have enough to do and to think of without having another troublesome girl poking in her nose.') 'I detest those sort of companions,' cried she ungratefully.

Louisa wisely elected not to repeat this little conversation. She was a sweet-natured woman, and such perplexing little outbreaks on the part of others were safe with her. She would not have them reach her mother's ear for the world.

And Penelope was really in earnest; it was no fit of childish petulance which prompted the above declaration. A month before, and she would have responded joyously to Louisa's announcement, and been as eager as heart could wish to know down to the minutest item everything her cousin could tell her about this stranger of her own age, who would be likely to share her own tastes and feelings — more likely, at least, than any of the Carnousties — and who would at least be able to talk the talk she was accustomed to.

A month before, she had been at her lowest ebb for society. She had often had to go for days and days without any — to be called any. It was at that time that she had most frequented

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the factor's house, and been fain to bake cakes and scones in the old ladies' kitchen, and beg for Katie and Flora to take her boating and fishing. She had been wont to say, 'If I had only *someone* to talk to!'

But now, it was all the other way round. She did not want to talk to anyone.

She wanted to be let alone, and do her work; give her whole mind to the task; ponder over it, probe it; wring out the bitter and the sweet of it.

Every other topic was flavourless. The narrow stage on which figured the two or three actors whose weal or woe was ever before her eyes was all-sufficient. How stupid, dull, commonplace, would sound the London prattle which had once been music to her ears!

And Penelope was conscious of being 'out of it' all, besides. She did not altogether like that. This worrying girl would stare at her ignorance, and perhaps patronise her on the strength of it, on finding that of current events and season novelties the whilom London young lady knew as little as her rustic cousins.

Should she try contempt? But she remembered how she herself had smiled at the air adopted by Lady Carnoustie and her disciples towards the topics of the time; and how in her own mind she had ridiculed the importance they attached to every trifling circumstance within their own radius, as compared with their indifference to the affairs of nations.

Lord Carnoustie alone perused a daily newspaper, and even he never found in it food for general conversation. His wife and his daughters were content to receive from him the news of a birth, marriage, or death, their own current literature confining itself to the local weekly and a few semi-religious organs. 'Dear mamma thought there was so much time wasted over reading newspapers,' Penelope had been informed.

At first Penelope had set herself steadily to disregard dear mamma. She was not obliged to give in to whims of this kind during a six months' stay; and, with something of defiance in her manner, she had insisted on discussing this point and that with her host, which she would openly preface by the words, 'It was in to-day's paper.' But Lady Carnoustie, for a wonder,

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had turned a deaf ear; and had she cared to do so she might now have exulted in the wisdom of such forbearance; since Penelope, finding that no one opposed her, and that it was difficult and poor sport making head against the old lord's lack of intelligence and ignorance of the subjects under treatment, gradually forgot to find her way into the library, where alone the *Times* was to be had, and after losing the thread once or twice, had now passed several weeks without having once glanced through the familiar sheets.

Accordingly she felt she did not know what people in general were about, or what was going on outside Carnoustie Castle.

Not only that, but she did not wish to know. She had been sleeping — dreaming — and was only half-awake. She would fain have resisted further rousing. It was this which made her reply with such brusquerie to poor Louisa's well-meant congratulations, and which sent her away with a frown on her brow.

Since the little scene in nurse Alison's room she had managed to be a good deal alone, excusing this to herself by the plea that she must think out the situation.

No one, not even her cousin Mina, held the key to the situation as she did. Mina only knew that her misplaced attachment had been discovered and put down with a high hand, stamped out indeed so swiftly and sternly as not to allow of a spark's escaping to illuminate anyone's ignorance; also she might guess with tolerable accuracy whom Penelope had designed should supplant and succeed Torquil Macalister in her affections; — but Mina had not heard Tosh.

That Tosh was speaking the truth, the exact truth, and nothing but the truth, Penelope had not a shadow of a doubt. Every presumption was in favour of its being so.

The poor half-witted creature was most unlikely to have thought of such a thing for himself, to begin with — his mind seldom running upon anything beyond his own daily needs, or the simple tattle of the countryside; and even if by any chance he had conjectured sufficient to form the basis of a piece of gossip relating to the Carnoustie family, he was faithful enough and shrewd enough not to bring it to Ailsie;

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'He would not dare to tell her anything but the truth,' wisely concluded Penelope.

Tosh was known to be more in awe of Mistress Alison than of any living being.

'Besides,' reflected Penelope, further, 'he was excited by something which had really happened, *that* anyone could see. If he had made it up, he would have looked differently, and spoken differently. He did not merely shout it out at me, to punish me for not listening; he had meant to tell the same thing with effect, from the first.'

Then after awhile, 'What a mean way of learning a thing! Mr. Redwood takes a friend into confidence about his matrimonial intentions, and a vagrant passing by overhears and comes running straight to us with the news. What a blessing no one was there but Ailsie and me! Ailsie must hold her tongue, as I shall do. It would be horrible if she were spreading it about, and I know it is what she has wanted all along, I know it is. Well, and so is it what I want. I — I want it very much.'

Penelope was out nearly two hours on the shore after this.

When she came in, she was quite cheerful; she had had a little struggle with herself, and conquered. It was so much better to know how matters really stood; and now that she had quite made up her mind about Mina, it was a great point to have some definite basis to go upon.

Now she need no longer waver, as she had been on the point of wavering, doubtful whether or not it were really wise to talk of Redwood so constantly to Mina, and of Mina to — no, *that* she had never done; she could not remember that she had ever yet discussed her cousin with Mr. Redwood. It was odd, but she had not. She had found so much else to talk about; and to be sure, Mina was not a person in connection with whom there was a great deal to be said. She lived her own life, and up to within the past few days that life had been an enigmatical one. Now that the enigma had been disposed of, Penelope could not but own that with it had vanished also much of the interest she had taken in her mysterious cousin.

To renew in herself that interest, as well as to heighten and

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strengthen it in another must be her present object. 'He must be *made* to think of her,' she repeated with energy, but anon would come with a strange little pang the afterthought, 'There will be no need to *make* him.'

All of this was very engrossing, and absorbed a considerable portion of Penelope's time and thoughts.

The dinner-party was to be on the same evening as that which saw the Ainslies arrive at the castle, in order to please Lord Carnoustie, who had reasons connected with the moor; and as his wife chanced to be suited with the arrangement, she permitted him to think it was his own.

The Ainslies were now the theme of every tongue, and it seemed wonderful how they had ever got on without the Ainslies. Penelope alone muttered to herself, 'What are these people coming for?' Even Mina, who had been downcast and depressed for some days, woke up on that which was to bring the all-important arrivals, and in place of finding in the name of Ainslie food for tender reminiscence and regret, joined in the preparations with a heartiness which surprised her cousin.

How soon Mina forgot! And it came back upon her that she, not Mina, had been the one whose lightheartedness had had to be reproved more than once of late by the pensive eye and tread of the other; yet here was she going about with a weight upon her steps, and a cold hand upon her heart, while Mina was recovering spirits and energy with every hour.

Mina ran after Penelope to announce that the steamer was in sight, about six o'clock. Penelope somewhat impatiently wondered why she need be told. She was not coming in; there was no need for her attendance at the entrance gate, nor yet for her presence in the drawing-room; it would be soon enough for her to meet the Ainslies when the party assembled before dinner.

'Oh, quite,' said Mina cheerfully, and ran away again.

Penelope let her eyes rest for a full minute upon the retreating figure, and a curious thought arose in her mind. What if, after all, Mina could have done without Redwood?

The long drawing-room at Carnoustie Castle was an imposing

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saloon with a majestic outlook, and though too large for ordinary use, and arranged with somewhat formal and old-fashioned precision, had not the desolate air of some state apartments. Penelope was fond of creeping in thither when tired of company, and had often made a gloomy afternoon pass more quickly by exploring its treasures, making herself familiar with the pictures on the walls, and handling the various relics and heirlooms on the tables. Sometimes she had curled herself up and been quite lost to sight within the capacious depths of a huge arm-chair or settee. No one would disturb her solitude for hours and hours if she sought the big, silent place; and she had learned to love its shadowy recesses, and feel in a vague kind of way that they were appropriate to the shadowy life led by the inmates of the castle.

When, on returning indoors, she was met by the announcement, 'The long drawing-room is in use to-night,' from her maid, and perceived that Marie was brimful of excitement over the arrival of guests to whom such an honour was accorded, she could not but concede a little curiosity and a little excitement also.

'The long drawing-room, Marie?'

'Yes, indeed, mademoiselle. I have been in to see. Truly it is a magnificent *salon*, and now that the covers are off——'

'Oh, the covers are off, are they?'

'Mademoiselle should see the beautiful damask — the crimson — the gold — all made on purpose, with the arms of the family emblazoned, quite superb! I have assisted the maids to take off the chintzes; I wanted so much to see; and the gardener brings in the flowers — bah! I say, "Monsieur Finlayson, shall I arrange — shall I take the bouquet to pieces and fill the vases?" But he says, "No." He have put the flowers in the long drawing-room for ever and ever; and he knows how miladi likes them. *Ma foi!* it was droll. The great lumps of flowers; but I say nothing. I let him stuff in the great tight posies into the vases. He looks at them quite satisfied. He goes away. I snatch them out again; I untie the string; I release the poor flowers——'

'Oh, I say, Marie! Suppose Lady Carnoustie does not like it!'

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Marie tittered. 'Miladi likes what Mistress Alison likes.'

'You have Ailsie on your side?'

'She is ready to embrace me, that poor old nurse. She nearly weeps. She takes me into the dining-room to see the dinner-table.'

'Was she pleased with the way I had dressed the dinner-table?'

It had been something of a pleasure to deck such a board as that in readiness when Penelope was summoned to fulfil her promise. She had been successful with her sprays and tendrils, and taken pride in an effect easily produced when all the concomitants were of such solid and massive splendour, — but she had forgotten to tell Ailsie about it.

Marie, however, could assure her that all was right in that respect. Ailsie had taken in half the establishment to 'see the table'; and to each and all the new-fashioned method of dressing it, as introduced by Miss Penelope, had been pointed out and dwelt upon.

Marie had also been given to understand that, though the party could only be a small one in point of numbers, it would be sufficiently *recherché* to warrant the wearing of her young lady's best dinner dress.

'Oh, I meant to put it on at any rate,' said Penelope, indifferently. But even her listless eye glistened as it rested on the pale shimmering robe which lay upon the bed, and which she had never seen since the day she came to the castle.

It had only been once worn in London, and there had never been any occasion for making even a much less elaborate toilette since.

Now the young girl owned that there was something reviving in the bare sight of a little finery; she surveyed with interest the dainty slippers and hose laid out; they looked festive and tempting; so did her pretty fan, her pearl necklace, her bracelets. The toilet-table wore an air of solemn and elaborate preparation.

'I am but just this moment finished,' quoth Marie, gloating. 'I have hurried; but I knew mademoiselle would not mind. I coax Miss Mina to let me arrange her hair. She has such wonderful fair, flaxen hair, like a doll's, so soft, so fine, — but it is

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arranged *shamefully*. It is a sin, it is wicked, so to arrange beautiful hair. I can no longer hold my tongue, so I ask as a little treat to myself, and Miss Mina she laughs and is pleased; and when you see her you will not know her. I have puffed it lightly — lightly; and she let me frizz it a little, a very little.'

'I have always told Mina she did her hair abominably. She will do it herself. To be sure the others are as bad, and Jessie does theirs.'

'But that Jessie! She is no better than themselves! Ah! you will see the change to-night. And she has a colour in her cheek, and her eye sparkles.'

'Looks well, does she? Marie,' said Penelope, with sudden energy, 'make me look well, too. Do your best for me as well as for my cousin. Come, make haste. I, too, have a colour in my cheek, and a sparkle in my eye. Why should I be outdone, even if — come along, Marie, come along. I want to dress up, and be fine. I want to be looked at and admired. I hunger for a little variety to-night, Marie. I want to be vain — to feel vain — to think about it, and not about other things. I am tired of other things. Oh Marie!' There was a tap at the door.

It was Mina fully dressed, and looking wonderfully pretty. She had come to explain and apologise for the delay which she feared had been occasioned by her acceptance of Marie's services. It was true that she had dressed early, on purpose; but still she feared that Penelope must have been put to inconvenience.

'Not at all,' said Penelope, taking her in from head to foot. 'There is no inconvenience about it. You look very nice; and Marie has done your hair to perfection. You cannot think how becoming it is to have it high above your forehead. After this, you must always wear it so. If you persist in liking to do it for yourself, Marie will teach you; will you not, Marie? I am so glad, dear,' there was a slight tremor in the speaker's voice, 'so very glad you should look especially pretty for to-night, when there are people here. These Ainslies will see you at your best,' turning over the ornaments on her table, and carefully abstaining from a glance at her cousin. ('She will understand. Marie may think it is for the Ainslies, but Mina will know for whom she is to look her best.')

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A gong sounded.

'You have still half an hour,' said Mina. 'But perhaps I had better go?' suggestively.

Penelope laughed at the lingering accents.

'Yes, indeed, you had better go, if I have only half an hour,' she cried. 'How do you suppose I am ever going to get down, if you stand talking there?' and Marie adroitly slipped open the door.

'Did I not tell mademoiselle?' quoth she, triumphantly.

Penelope smiled.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

'CAN BOB ——?'

MEANTIME, in another part of the castle a great transformation scene was taking place.

Louisa and Joanna, excited by the magnitude of the occasion, and still further thrown off their balance by the representations of their maid Jessie, had permitted the latter to display from beneath her black silk apron an artful-looking instrument.

This was a crimping-iron.

It had got wind that the Frenchwoman was in Miss Mina's bedroom, and Marie had been heard to boast that she meant to give Mademoiselle Mina a 'head' for once in her life.

Naturally, Jessie's spirit was stirred within her.

She had never been allowed to tie and curl the flaxen tresses which were the pride of the family; and it had always been a grievance that even the elder Misses Carnoustie would not have their own less luxuriant, but still fairly creditable locks arranged in modern fashion.

'We have always been used to wearing our hair like this, you know, Jessie.' Miss Louisa had mildly resisted every expostulation; and to each other the sisters had added before Jessie, though not to her directly, 'Dear mamma would not like to see it done in any other way.'

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On the present occasion, however, Jessie resolved upon one more effort. Her ladyship, she suggested, could not object *for once*. There was Miss Mina, she would not let anyone touch her hair as a rule, but now Marie was closeted with her, and had been so for some time. Miss Mina could not think her mamma would disapprove of a change for once and away. Everyone had their fancies; and people must have their hairs done in their own ways; and of course she would go back to Miss Louisa's own way if she chose; she would do it just the sameas before, — for every day, — but for the dinner-party — and catching a look of indecision, the shrewd abigail whipped out the crimping-iron, and affected to think the matter settled.

'What do you think, Joanna?'

The elderly young ladies regarded each other wistfully.

'Perhaps a little wave?' murmured Joanna.

'Just a *wave* — not a *crimp*,' appended Louisa.

Then they both looked at Jessie, who steadily evaded the look.

'I'll do Miss Louisa first, and then you'll both see how it sets her,' quoth she, bustling. 'I have got my own little lamp here.' Out it came from beneath the apron. 'You'll excuse its being mine, Miss Louisa, but I did not like to go to the expense of another lamp; though I bought the tongs new, because if you don't want them I can take them for myself, so it's not money wasted.'

'Certainly we will not let you pay for them, Jessie,' said Miss Louisa, with the feeling of a gentlewoman. 'You bought them for us, and whether we use them or not you shall not be the loser.'

'Oh, well, Miss Louisa, it is but a matter of ninepence.'

'Ninepence! Only ninepence! Dear me! I thought they would have been four or five shillings at the least,' taking up the implement and inspecting it. It was almost inconceivable that such a worldly, fashionable article could be had for ninepence. 'I am glad they were no more, Jessie,' proceeded Miss Louisa, gravely; 'and it was very obliging of you to think of us. Perhaps, Joanna — ahem! — you would be done first?'

Joanna, however, was all in a flutter at the idea. If dear

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Louisa did not mind — Louisa's hair had a little natural wave as it was, whereas her own was quite, absolutely straight: she really *could* not sit down first.

Louisa resigned herself.

The upshot of the whole was that by the end of an hour the sisters would hardly have known each other. To their unsophisticated eyes they looked smart, dashing, rampant, — and in consequence they rejoiced with trembling.

'Certainly it is a great improvement to Miss Joanna,' allowed Miss Louisa with secret complacency. 'I must own, Jessie, that you have made Miss Joanna look — look really quite — quite —— '

'Miss Joanna looks just beautiful, and so does yourself, Miss Louisa.' Honestly the little handmaiden was delighted with her work.

'I had no idea you were such a hairdresser, Jessie.'

'How should you, Miss Louisa? You never would give me the chance.'

'Did I see you put in a little puff at the back of mine?' inquired Joanna. Louisa had wisely been blind.

'Oh, well, it was just nothing of a puff, Miss Joanna. They're used to give a firmness. Miss Ainslie's maid and me was talking, and she says, says she, you must have *something*. So then — but you'll go and see how your mamma likes you? And Miss Louisa, just let me —— ' and with a feigned intentness on a stray lock, Jessie tided over the interpolation of the artful frisette.

Until she was well into the midst of the operation no frisette had been visible. Neither had innumerable hairpins, nor a little bit of tying ribbon, until finally both her ladies had learned to be surprised at nothing. When each erection had been crowned by a dexterous little bow perched cunningly on one side, and when they alike remembered that Alice Ainslie had discovered just such another tiny velvet top-knot on removing her hat before coming upstairs, they could not but admire the alertness with which their good Jessie had picked up the new idea and utilised it.

'I knew your mamma had velvets in plenty, so I just got

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Dickinson to give me a little of each colour. And they go nicely with your dresses;' and the faithful creature ambled round her two spare, faded, meek-eyed charges; and drawn towards them by bonds of affection, begot of many a kindness and unvarying gentleness, told herself indignantly that the administrators of more youthful charms should not have all the crow to themselves.

She would back her ladies, if it came to backing. They should not be put upon, for all they were not so young as they had once been.

Miss Mina was all very well, but (meeting Mina on the stairs presently) she did not see but that she could have done for her as well as that Marie had. She did not see any such great difference between Marie's style and her own. Miss Mina had hair that anyone could make stand on end. When it was blown out by the wind it looked as well as it did now, for all Marie's boasting. She wished Miss Mina had had a newer fashioned frock; that was what she needed far more than a great high cushion on the top of her head.

None of them had dinner dresses fit to show against — then all of a sudden out came Penelope from her room. Little round-faced Jessie stood still, ostensibly to let the young lady pass; in reality, — to draw breath, and stare.

Penelope, a brilliant lovely vision, in opal-tinted draperies gleaming in the sunset, nodded at her as she ran past. In another mood she would have stood still, and good-humouredly invited the lady's maid to a closer inspection of her delicate finery, — but she was impatient now for other applause.

Yes, she would shine to-night — shine for the good of all. These Ainslies, about whom so much had been said and thought, of whom the rare old Carnoustie blood itself stood in awe, she would show them that someone in the place knew how to dress and sparkle.

Then she was late; her cousins had all gone down; she must not stop to speak to Jessie, or anyone; and she flew, rustling and shimmering, down the broad, antiquated staircase.

The drawing-room party was complete as she entered, and the figure of Redwood stood out prominently from among the

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men. The Ainslies, father and son, were small of stature, and minute at every point; Lord Carnoustie was squat and bandy-legged; while neither Mr. Merriman nor Mr. Soutter (who was the only other guest) had any figure to speak of at all.

Perhaps this was the reason why Penelope, as she made her way up the room, saw only one of the group distinctly. Or, again, perhaps it was because Redwood was looking at her.

She met his eye. At the moment it seemed a mere nothing, but afterwards she recalled that flash of recognition, and wondered why she did so. She was not thinking of Redwood, but of the new Louisa, and the new Joanna, who were endeavouring to appear unconscious of their own altered looks, and of their father's behaviour.

Lord Carnoustie could not keep his secret mirth out of his countenance, though too much of a gentleman to permit himself a remark.

He had never seen anything to equal this before; and he was now in his heart comparing his two elder daughters to a pair of horned cattle, and wondering what had possessed them to surmount their meek, limp faces by such fierce projections. From time to time he must needs give vent to little ill-suppressed explosions, which he was fain to pass off as fits of coughing; and when he perceived a reflex of these in the countenance of Penelope, he had enough ado to keep from laughing outrageously. He really hardly durst look at anyone, and yet it was impossible to help looking. 'For all the world like two young stirks!' quoth he to himself.

'It is too bad to laugh. They look very *nice*,' was Penelope's comment; and she was in the act of choking down her own inclinations to risibility, and shaking her head at the old lord, when Lady Carnoustie's voice summoned her. Lady Carnoustie wished to present Penelope to the ladies of the group; and as she did so, a thrill of pride and satisfaction stole through her veins.

She had been careful not to say too much about Penelope; she did not wish it to appear as if there were anything unusual in a member of the gay world being on a visit to the castle; and she had, in consequence, merely made that casual reference to

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her visitor which had been caught up by Lady Ainslie. Lady Ainslie now shot an exultant glance at her son.

She had said Penelope would be pretty, and Penelope was charmingly pretty. Well dressed, too: in truth, beside the out-of-date dinner robes of the Carnousties and the somewhat spent finery of their guests, Penelope's satin and gauze, fresh from its folds of silver tissue paper, looked almost dazzling. Down to the toe of her little slipper all she wore was harmonious, perfect of its kind.

'Dear! what a lovely and what an *expensive* dress!' mentally ejaculated the dowager, habituated to noting such details. 'This must be a rich girl. Can she be an heiress? Can Bob ——'

Involuntarily she signalled to Bob; and Bob, who a minute before had been leaning his dejected elbow against the mantelpiece, mournfully prepared for anything, was by her side, metaphorically speaking, at a bound. In strict language, he was sidling along towards her as fast as possible, his small pointed face flaring with surprise and excitement, when the dinner was announced; and, as luck would have it, even such haste was turned to good account; for whether or not she had intended doing so before, Lady Carnoustie seized the opportunity to bid Captain Ainslie hand Miss East in to dinner, and his precipitation seemed only the natural consequence of a whisper on the part of his host.

Now Penelope, having made up her mind to be gay, presently found no difficulty in being so.

Bob Ainslie was a far more amusing man than Redwood. With Redwood she had herself to supply the jesting, the vivacity; while the most she ever received from him in return was a half-extorted smile, or a happy look. Certainly he sometimes looked happy when with her; she was rewarded by an instinctive feeling that she was appreciated, that she was sought, and that the man who had erst shunned her society was now content with it. When with Penelope he never seemed to wish to get away; he was not absent nor preoccupied; he was in no haste to be elsewhere. She knew she had conquered not only aversion but indifference, and, pleased with such success, wisely

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resolved to proceed no further. She would be very good friends with her cousin's lover.

But Captain Ainslie was really a first-rate companion; nor was he, though small, at all to be despised in the matter of looks. When seated at table, and leaning back in his chair, he might have been any height; and when his features were brought out into strong relief by a delicate and becoming candle-light they were clear cut and regular.

'A very nice little man,' pronounced his partner to herself. 'Quite a dear little mannie.' And turning her shoulder fixedly on Felix Merriman, who was on her other side, and who had reckoned on receiving at least half of her attention, she was soon in the full tide of chatter, and delighted with herself for being so.

In the morning she had not thought she could endure tittle-tattle, and here was she not only enduring but positively tossing the ball to and fro with a sense of exhilaration! No such opportunity for showing off her gay, brilliant self had occurred since she came to this dull place, and it was delightful — yes, it certainly was delightful — to be bright, and witty, and merry once more.

She was conscious that Redwood was looking at her. She hoped he was admiring her.

He and Mina were seated on the opposite side of the table, a little further up; by talking to Captain Ainslie only, and ignoring Mr. Merriman's claims, she could prevent herself from watching how the pair got on, from being too much interested in them; and enable them — or at least Mina — to feel quite free from *surveillance*. Had her cousin been placed where she could be seen too easily, Penelope knew that she could not have avoided watching every movement.

This was natural. The match was of her making. But for her, Redwood might have sighed in vain; and if now he would only hurry up, make his formal offer, and be engaged, married, and done with, it was all she wanted.

Wherefore she kept her eyes steadily off him at the dinner-table.

The hapless Merriman, wondering what he had done to de-

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serve such treatment, soon found himself by no means as well off as he had intended to be, with Miss Alice Ainslie on the one hand, and Miss Penelope East on the other. He had been not merely satisfied, but exultant when he took his place, and found it was between the two prettiest girls in the room; but when, having kept up a brisk dialogue with his legitimate companion throughout two courses, he thought it time for a new attitude and new smiles, he was a little taken aback to find himself unable to obtain the refreshment.

Twice he essayed, and twice was foiled. Penelope, indeed, made the response courtesy demanded, but in the perfunctory manner which carries its own conviction; and on each occasion the subject started was suffered to drop at her hands, while she plunged into the heart of a fresh one the next minute with the more fortunate Ainslie.

Every now and then, too, Lord Carnoustie would listen and laugh, and join in Penelope's gaiety. He had tried to stipulate for having her on his left hand, to help him to endure Lady Ainslie on his right. For dowagers of Lady Ainslie's order he had an aversion mingled with respect, which made it impossible for him to eat his dinner in comfort when one was upon his hands; but he thought he could get through the meal a shade better if he had Penelope to fall back upon.

'It is hardly her place,' Lady Carnoustie had demurred.

'Hoots! Her place? What is her place? I don't suppose she has any "place" — a bit of a smatchet like that! Put her down anywhere, and she'll giggle and laugh. She may as well be next me as next anyone else.'

'Miss Ainslie ought to be on your left hand.'

But this was just what he had been dreading.

'I knew it!' he cried. 'I knew that was what you were driving at! But I tell you, I'll *not* have her, not if you bully me till Doomsday! It's no use your talking — I won't hear a word. If you put that girl on one side of me and her mother on the other, I'll get up and leave the dinner-table.'

This was serious. He might not leave the dinner-table, but he certainly would be a surly host and a disagreeable companion: no fears of after reproaches would have the slightest

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effect, as wife and daughters well knew; — and it was deemed advisable to yield the point.

When places were being taken, however, a slight alteration had to be made — two gentlemen had to sit together; and Bob Ainslie, who possessed the happy knack of doing everything easily, provided it were nothing of the slightest importance, popped into the chair next his host, and with such good grace and such a little facetious remark as bid fair for his being an acquisition rather than the reverse; so that even Lord Carnoustie cleared his brow, and responded with a laugh.

Nor was the fair promise unfulfilled. No more entertaining companion had ever before come to Carnoustie Castle. Dispassionately speaking, perhaps, the old lord owned afterwards there might have been nothing very remarkable in Ainslie's anecdotes, and the sayings of others whereby he garnished his own conversation — but what a droll way the fellow had of telling things! It was as good as a play to hear him run on.

'I must really introduce him to Tosh,' he wound up in conclusion.

Meantime Mr. Soutter also had his eye on Ainslie. Mr. Soutter had been invited, as a matter of course, to the august festivity, it being a part of the Carnoustie creed that their factor had his 'place' as surely as anyone else, and that it was part of his 'place' to dine, whenever there was anything to dine for, at the castle.

Either Louisa or Joanna usually fell to Mr. Soutter's lot, and liked it. It was pleasanter talking to Mr. Soutter, who knew all about the people they knew, whose interests were identical with their own, and whom they could never get all to themselves on any other occasion, than to a stranger, whom they had to enlighten as to their own topics, and to receive enlightenment from on his.

It was so comfortable to have Mr. Soutter.

And they liked Mr. Soutter to see them dressed up, and rather grand. Mr. Soutter never found them the least different to *him*, either in manner or anything else, whatever they wore, or whoever was there. Also he himself was equally unaltered, always unassuming, respectful, composed; but still Mr. Soutter

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in evening clothes, and the Carnoustie family *en grand tenue*, met each other like new people; and neither Louisa nor Joanna felt that it was quite the same thing conversing solemnly with Mr. Soutter during the stately movements of a dinner-party, as interchanging brisk parleys with him under everyday auspices, in everyday garments.

Mr. Soutter sat next to Lady Ainslie, with Miss Joanna Carnoustie on his other side, on the present occasion.

Mr. Soutter knew all about the Ainslies — even to their mortgages. He had pity on them. They had been ill used by fate. Sir Robert had been weak and wavering, and maybe a little slow to accommodate himself to circumstances, the worthy factor allowed, — but still he was sorry for Sir Robert.

With a bit of nursing, the estate might come round yet, and if a little money could be brought into the family — 'Aye, aye; that might do well enough,' he cogitated, as his eyes rested on the fair face of Penelope East.

CHAPTER XXXV.

'I'VE KNOWN A LASSIE MARRY FOR A PEAT-STACK.'

On the rare occasions when John Soutter dined at the castle his sisters always sat up till he came home, to hear his account.

They could have had this at their leisure in the morning, for though the factor was often out late on his rounds he rarely started early, and breakfast was with him the most leisurely meal of the day, — but Jean and Marianne could not wait for the morning.

They were simple old children who wanted to eat their cake off-hand, and having beguiled the time of their brother's absence by eking out all the information they had previously been able to gather concerning the festivity — and supplementing it by conjectures and suppositions — they would be far too impatient about the time the reveller might be expected back, to think of going to bed and to sleep.

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At ten o'clock they would trim the lamp and stir the fire afresh.

Summer though it was, fires were rarely dropped after dark either at the castle or the factor's house; for however strong the sun might be in the daytime, the evenings were pretty sure to be sufficiently cool to make the kindling of a cheery blaze welcome to all.

Between ten and eleven a pretty close watch would be kept from the front door.

In the silence without an approaching step could be heard some way off; and again and again Marianne, who was the principal listener, would cry aloud, 'I hear him!' mistaking the tread of some wandering animal for that of her brother, before the sharp click of the little gate at the bottom of the garden, and its subsequent unmistakable clang, would make her run joyfully out with her, 'Eh, John, is that you?' which told for certain that the watch was at an end.

In their eagerness to hear John would scarcely be allowed to speak. Each sister would implore the other to 'Whisht,' and would declare that the tale would never be told, for all the interposition and importunities; and would herself demand of John, and clamour and interrupt John, until finally reduced to silence for very lack of breath and intensity of curiosity.

On the present occasion curiosity, which as a rule had thus to wait its turn, actually tied the good ladies' tongues from the first.

They had learned more beforehand about this dinner-party than they were in the habit of doing; it being one of Lady Carnoustie's precepts not to 'say too much to the Misses Soutter about such affairs, because although the Misses Soutter knew their place far too well to expect to be invited, still it would be hardly polite to dilate to them upon festivities in which they were to have no share.' The Misses Soutter had never been promoted to anything beyond a luncheon with the family.

The principle was just, but had Lady Carnoustie been more closely acquainted with the feelings of the two humble-minded women, she would have seen that she might have talked and let

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anyone else talk to any extent on the subject, not only without fear of giving offence, but with the absolute certainty of bestowing enjoyment. They would have rejoiced to have been taken into confidence as to arrangements and preparations, and desired nothing more.

'I wish you two were coming,' Penelope had said when informing her friends of the Ainslie dinner-party.

'Penelope! What an idea! What would two plain old bodies like us do at your grand dinner-party? We have never dined at the castle in our lives, even when there was nobody there, let alone when Lord and Lady Carnoustie had company!'

'But why shouldn't you? Mr. Soutter is coming.' This was wanting in tact, but neither speaker nor hearers felt it so.

'John goes as Lord Carnoustie's factor,' explained Miss Jean, with dignity. 'The factor always dines at the great house, my dear. It is understood. Our father used to dine regularly every few months at the duke's, and our mother was occasionally asked when they were quite by themselves, for the duke and duchess were so kind, and the duke liked to play a game of chess with our mother, and said he once, "I never have a better antagonist than Mrs. Soutter!" Indeed, I have heard our mother say that he was no very great hand at chess for all he was a duke; and that sometimes she found it difficult to let him beat at just the right time; for though she would play him very even till near the end of the game, of course she never would have presumed to give him checkmate. He would not have liked that at all.'

'There! Your mother dined with the duke and duchess where your father was factor, so I don't see why you and Miss Marianne should not come with Mr. Soutter on Tuesday.'

'That's very nice of you, Penelope, and I'm sure we feel, both Marianne and me, that you would be glad to have us; but, my dear, we are not quite like our mother, nor yet is Lady Carnoustie just the kind of person the duchess was. The duchess was the freest-spoken, pleasantest-voiced creature. She used to pick us bairns out of the road and take us for a drive in her pony carriage if she caught sight of us as she went by, and

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we always ended at the sweetie shop. Not but what Lady Carnoustie is pleasant enough. I'm sure we have no reason to complain, nor yet has John, and I never can make out what people mean by saying she is proud and haughty, but it is not everybody who has the way of being free without being *overly*. Penelope, my dear,' Miss Jean stroked her young visitor's hand and looked fondly into her face, 'I think I know one person who has it.'

'Me, Miss Jean?'

'Aye, my dear, you.'

The next moment Penelope's arms were round her neck. 'You to say that to me! If it had not been for you — and Miss Marianne — I don't know what I should have done sometimes, I was so miserable here. I am not miserable now, but I am often dull, and sometimes things don't seem very real to me, and it is all a puzzle,' her hold relaxing and a cloud stealing over her young brow. 'Do you know what it is to feel like that? I want help, and yet I don't want it. I don't know what I want. It will come right in time, I suppose. But anyhow, I am always happy when I am here with you, and I thought that perhaps I should not be very happy on Tuesday night, and that was partly why I wanted you to come. I hoped you had been asked.'

'My dear, we haven't clothes if we were ever so much asked.'

'I'm sure you have quite good enough clothes ——'

''Deed and we have not, and Lady Carnoustie knows it. John had to get a dress suit as soon as ever he got the factor's situation; but we just waited to see.'

'Oh, then, you did think there was a chance?'

Miss Jean coughed discreetly.

'No, my dear, no; not a chance to call a chance. To be sure, Marianne had learned cribbage, thinking it was easier than chess, and that Lord Carnoustie, having been in the army when he was a young man, would likely have been fond of cards; but you see directly we came to the place, and got to know the sort of person Lady Carnoustie was, we saw Marianne might have spared her pains. Lady Carnoustie won't have a pack of cards in the

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house, — and very right too. Only Marianne was just a little disappointed, for she had been at some pains learning, and neither John nor I can play, so it was all to no good.'

'Perhaps Miss Marianne would teach me?'

'There, now, Penelope, if that isn't like you! Well, if she can remember, but I doubt she has forgotten. I know she used to get quite in a way with her "fifteen twos" as it was! We can ask her, and see what she says.'

'And I'll tell you all about the dinner-party; though, after all, it can't be very much of a dinner-party, you know. Only seven strangers — that is, the four Ainslies, Mr. Redwood and his friend, and Mr. Soutter. Then we are six in the house — that makes thirteen altogether. Oh, but I know we are not thirteen, for though Lady Carnoustie professes not to be superstitious, she has had the sense to stop short of thirteen. I *am* superstitious; it would have frightened me to death. Stop! I remember it is Dr. McWhinnock who is to save us. With Dr. McWhinnock we shall be fourteen in all, and fourteen will look few enough in that huge dining-room. Yet we are as much excited and there is as much steam put on at the old castle as though we were to be a dozen dozen!'

She had to tell all that she had seen and heard on every hand.

There was nothing mean in this. Penelope never ran off to her old friends with revelations which the Carnoustes would have disliked her making. She merely regaled the well-pleased ears of the faithful couple with the simplest of odds and ends, with her own surprise and delight over the family treasures of plate and china displayed by Ailsie, with the imposing grandeur of the unveiled drawing-room, and such trifling items. But, as we have said, it had all been hearkened to with ravenous appreciation, and when, on the afternoon which was to see the Ainslies arrive, there had been no appearance of the bright figure which the good spinsters had learned to expect so often of late, they had experienced a blank sensation of disappointment.

They had reckoned on Penelope's being over to tell them how the table looked.

Penelope had meant to go, moreover, but her spirits had

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flagged somewhat after a certain little incident, and she had not felt in the humour for questioning and cross-questioning.

Afterwards, as we know, the mood passed, and she was excited and talkative at the dinner-table, and fairly animated throughout the remainder of the evening.

Mr. Soutter had noted this, as in his quiet way he noticed a great deal for the benefit of his womenkind at home. He was an attached brother, and as he no more than they felt affronted by their being excluded from Lady Carnoustie's invitation, he made it a rule to have as much to tell on his return from the castle as possible.

He would even studiously note the details of dress dear to the feminine heart; so that her ladyship's black velvet and point lace was as well-known by repute to the good Jean and Marianne as were her daughters' blue silks, with low necks and short sleeves.

It was the family creed that Mina should still be dressed in white with a broad sash.

Miss Soutter had made Penelope describe her own Parisian costume, and had in her secret soul wondered if it would look well enough, girlish and innocent enough, beside Miss Mina's white muslin.

She now demanded, among the first items, that John should tell her, how Penelope looked?

John took out his handkerchief and blew his nose.

'Not just her best, perhaps, John?'

The factor's eyes twinkled, and he put back his handkerchief.

'Did the ——' but Marianne raised her hand to stay her sister. 'Whisht — whisht! Let the man speak. Speak out, John. We're all friends. Penelope was a thought dowdy? Not quite so dressy as she might have been? She was not to wear white, we know; and we thought it something of a pity ——'

'Whisht — whisht! Let the man speak.' It was now Jean's turn. 'Be frank, John,' she adjured. 'Was she — was it — were you disappointed in Penelope, John?'

The crucial question had been put. With parted lips and bated breath, each devout adherent of the perchance outshone and overshadowed favourite waited for the verdict.

'Was I disappointed?' said John. Then he rubbed his knee,

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and his eyes seemed to kindle and shoot back into the past. 'Disappointed?' He lifted his hand and brought it down with a bang upon the table. '*No.*' Then his mouth widened into a slow smile. 'Disappointed? That would have been a queer thing to be. That lassie ——' then he shook his head, the smile continuing, and gazed into the fire as upon a fair retrospect. 'The bonniest thing that ever came to old Carnoustie Castle! Like a pearl, she was — pure and glistening. Like a bit bairn — laughing and rosy blushing. Was I disappointed in Penelope, quotha? Faix, if I was, there were others that were not! Eh, it was a sight to see yon youngster, yon Ainslie lad! He fair loupit at her as a cock at a grosert![1] And he's not a bad lad, ready with his tongue; civil; conversational. He came round and sat by me after the ladies had left; and says he, "Ah, Mr. Soutter, if my father had had *you* to manage for him, we need never have left Robert's Tower." Says I, "I trust to see you back at Robert's Tower yet, Captain." He laughed at that, but I'm thinking he guessed what I meant. It would be the making of him.'

'What would?' The sisters were mystified.

'What? Oh, a marriage with a heiress. All the Ainslies want is money, and they are not *that* hard up either, they're not over head and ears; only a bittie under water for the time being. Mr. East could clear them by putting his hand in his pocket; and if Penelope ——'

'Penelope!'

'Aye, Penelope. Amn't I telling you about Penelope? Troth, if you had been there to-night you would have needed no telling! Mind you,' as the sisters glanced at each other with amazement and something of perturbation in their countenances, 'mind you, you're not to go off at a tangent with this. It would never do to let on I had seen anything or told anything, — but as sure as I'm a living man, once that young soldier knows that Penelope's the woman to set him on his legs, he'll need no one to egg him on to the match.'

'Do you mean that Penelope is — rich, brother?' Miss Jean

[1] Gooseberry.

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spoke in a singularly subdued voice. 'Of course we know she is an only child ——'

'The only child of a rich man usually is considered so,' replied John, drily.

'Yes, I suppose Mr. East is a rich man.' Miss Jean was still thoughtful and perturbed. 'But we thought — we fancied — Marianne and I — that there was someone else who had an eye upon Penelope ——'

'Like enough! She will have plenty of eyes upon her.'

'Do you suppose Mr. Redwood knows about it? Do you suppose ——'

'Redwood? Ha! I never thought of that,' interrupted her brother, in his turn surprised. 'Redwood knows, of course. All London people know about each other. And so he has been having a try, has he? He's a sharp fellow; but somehow it never struck me. To be sure I have not seen much of him. You have seen him and Penelope together oftener than I have.'

'And we thought, Marianne and I, that, especially of late, there was certainly *something* — but,' amended Miss Jean, with a troubled look, 'if it's her money Redwood is after ——'

'I'm not saying that it is, but it looks like it. Let me see, did not he arrive in the place on the very same day that she did? Did they not travel by the same steamer? Did they not both come from London? It looks queer — monstrous queer — if there be nothing in it. I have been a gowk not to think of that before. But, to tell the truth, my thoughts went another way; it was Mina I had in my mind for Redwood, if I must out with it; though, mind ye — both of ye — not a word, not a whisper,' with uplifted hand; 'if either my lord or my lady caught wind that we had ——'

''Deed, brother, an' they would be right. It would ill become us to be talking. But just among ourselves,' and drawing their chairs closer, the worthy trio discussed the subject far into the night.

'Well, we'll see what we'll see,' concluded John, rising at last with a prolonged yawn. 'I'm for my bed, now. If you get a chance, just drop a word — it will need be a gey careful word,

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for she's as sharp as a needle, yon lassie is — into Penelope's ear. Crack up the Ainslies; they're decent folks; and the estates have passed from father to son for six generations. She would be "My Lady," too; and the Carnousties would be pleased to link on again with that stock. There has been no marriage between them for a while back. It would be a very suitable alliance — a very — suitable — reasonable alliance. Penelope's father would think we had done well by his daughter; and the best of it is, the youngster hardly knew her name, let alone her heiress-ship, when he set to work. He was struck all of a heap by her looks. And she did look a pretty creature — a pretty creature,' relapsing into a note of tender admiration. 'I wondered little at Ainslie. I would have wondered at no man. Lord! what a difference dress makes! Penelope now — I never thought anything of Penelope till to-night, except, maybe, that she was a bit cheery thing. But as for Redwood, I hold to my opinion. He's off, if he ever was on. He has had his answer, whether in words or not. A nod's as good as a wink to a blind man. Lassies know how to make themselves understood. Penelope had not a word for Redwood to-night; and now that I think of it, he looked as glum as a hearse horse, — though what it was about I had not the wit to discover. I never thought of Penelope; but looking back, it's as clear as day to me. He's not like to be after Mina, then? Well, well; I would have liked the poor girl to have had *someone* after her; it's but natural at her age; and I can't but think a little more visiting and society is cheerful for young folks; but, to be sure, Lord and Lady Carnoustie must know their own business. Well, well; it's all for the best, I dare say. They're not a marrying race, the Carnousties. And if they are satisfied, no one else has any call to complain. But don't you let Penelope go and throw herself away upon this Redwood, come from no one knows where! An Englishman! a Londoner — a mere nobody! when she might marry into the Ainslies! Just you tell her about Robert's Tower, and all the beautiful woods and streams. The best salmon fishing in Ayrshire, ——'

'Preserve us, John! A lassie does n't marry for salmon fishing.'

'I've known a lassie marry for a peat-stack. Don't you for-

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get the salmon fishing when you are talking of the Ainslie property. It's an item; and every item tells. Trust me, Penelope's not such a fool as to "lichtlie" a good salmon river. She's pleased enough with the young fellow as it is; and with judicious handling we may have it a match before we know where we are.'

CHAPTER XXXVI.

'DID YOU NOTICE MR. REDWOOD'S FACE?'

Poor Lady Ainslie, whom Nature had never designed for a schemer, had by sheer force of circumstances been turned of recent years into one.

Could she have gone on and on living her shallow easy life at Robert's Tower, entertaining and being entertained, dispensing hospitality and amiability to all within her reach, she would never have worried herself over any subject whatever, nor perhaps would there ever have appeared those little lines which were now drawn about the corners of her mouth.

But it is hard to be not only from hand to mouth oneself, but to have children — grown-up children — hanging upon one's decisions and one's purse; turning up at every point, eager to know what is to be done for them, and with them, — questions for which there is no satisfactory answer, and which have already been pondered over in secret hours of trouble.

Captain Ainslie was not an only son: there were boys at Sandhurst; there was a boy in Germany; and there was another in India. All of these had to be provided for somehow, and every year the problem of providing became a more difficult one to solve. She had grown to dread the very letters that announced a holiday.

Like parents, like children; naturally the offspring of a heedless, improvident couple were gay of heart, and inclined rather to believe in Fortune than to challenge her. As we have seen, Bob Ainslie did not at the present time even bestir himself

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sufficiently to obtain the invitations which his soul loved, preferring rather to drift along beneath the maternal wing, and take whatever came in his way.

'He will never do *anything* for himself!' she would now and then cry, when at her wits' end, distracted by the absence of even the most slender amount of practical sense on the part of the *insouciant* dandy and favourite. 'I am doing all I *can*, and more than I *like*, to find him amusement and house-room; and he takes it as a matter of course, and will not even fall in with my views, until I have argued with him and persuaded him.'

She never appealed to Sir Robert; Sir Robert would have bidden her cut Bob adrift on the instant. He had been peevishly averse to being saddled with his son from the first moment that the tour of autumn visits was projected, and all his wife would have got from him, had she essayed now to complain or consult, would have been, 'I told you so, but you would not believe me. Send him about his business. Tell him we can't manage to take him along any further.'

Had she ventured upon, 'But he has nowhere to go, and he has not funds to keep himself at hotels or places of that kind,' she would have been met with, 'The more fool he! He ought to have thought of that, and made friends, and got invitations.' She might have talked for hours and she would have got no further.

It was perhaps this absence of sympathy and support from her husband in her hour of need, which told more upon the poor struggling woman than all besides. She would have done everything for her children; Sir Robert would do nothing. His own misfortunes and embarrassments had weakened whatever paternal affections he might once have had, and his one thought now was how to be as little encumbered by them, and hear as little about them as possible.

They must learn to do as others did. The world was full of other people's younger sons; and if *they* could make their way, so could his. He had never intended to bring them up to idleness; and, by George! they must work now, if they never did before; now, when he had not a roof to shelter himself, let alone them.

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Some such outburst would be tolerably sure to follow the arrival of an epistle from Archie or Davie, announcing a month's or a fortnight's leave, and begging to know what was to be done with it. Lady Ainslie would be sitting by sighing, with the note in her hand. Sir Robert would be very cross with her — cross, as he had never been at Robert's Tower. He would demand to know what she wanted, and what she meant by those funereal sighs? She would own that she was wondering if the little cupboard near Alice's room could take in a bed, and hoping that perhaps the boy might be allowed to make use of his father's dressing-room.

At first Sir Robert would swear he should allow nothing of the kind; but ultimately a tacit consent would be wrung gloomily out of him, and the boisterous young cadet, to whom the whole thing was a good joke, would take possession not only of the cupboard and the dressing-room, but of every other nook in the lodgings; leave his things in every corner, turn everything upside down, wonder why nobody was jolly as they used to be at home, and finally end by being somewhat the reverse of jolly himself, and not at all sorry when his term of absence was expired.

Still, Sir Robert was more tolerant when it came to the point towards these jovial lads than towards his eldest son and heir.

He simply could not stand Bob. Bob's air of negligent well-being, his indifference to Fate, his contentment, above all, his calm habit of providing himself with the best of everything, and his being able to do so in spite of the cloud which hung over the family fortunes, was a constant exasperation. Sir Robert could not conceive how the thing was done.

He himself, with a sense of bitter degradation, had come to buying hats and coats from cheap tradesmen, and had reduced by one-half the number that used to be periodically sent him. He had cut down his county subscriptions. When in London he went about in omnibuses.

But Bob would dash up to the door in a hansom, and there was not a neater nor a smarter-looking fellow to be seen in Pall Mall.

A growl from his father would invariably be turned aside with a laugh and a cheerful, 'All right, sir. I know what I'm about!'

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with which it was perhaps prudent to seem satisfied, lest interest and interference might have been misinterpreted.

'If he thinks he is going to get any help from me, beyond his allowance — it is as much as I can do to give him that!' Sir Robert would exclaim, when what he termed some 'ruinously expensive' article made its appearance; but he never could find out what his wife thought on the subject.

The truth was, as has been said, that by sheer dint of sorely won experience poor Lady Ainslie was learning to play another part in life than that for which she had been originally cast.

She was being taught silence, patience, and a certain kind of wisdom. No one would have guessed how much the poor creature passed through, seeing how little she said about it.

Some daughters would have helped to bear this brunt, and comforted and consoled with brave, loving words and little tender ministrations; but Alice Ainslie, though not an abnormally selfish girl, was too full of her own concerns to have much time or sympathy to spare for those of others. She would occasionally kiss her mother and tell her not to 'bother'; and she would indignantly turn upon her brother, and vow it was 'a shame' for Bob to expect to have everything done for him like a baby; but she was generally full of some project or other got up by her own friends, with whom she was a favourite — or she was just going out — or had just come in and must take off her things — or she had a dozen notes to send off — in some way or other she was busy, and had so obvious an impatience of being caught, and such a palpable desire to be left in peace to pursue her own devices, that there was no help to be had from her when difficulties arose on the family horizon.

Sometimes Lady Ainslie wondered what would be the end of these, or whether they would ever have an end at all?

Sir Robert's solicitor had airily named 'half a dozen years or so' as the limits of their enforced wanderings; of these, three had been spent; but so far from being in any better case, they were in worse than when their exile began.

The boys were more expensive; Alice was grown up; there were all kinds of unforeseen claims to be met, and the rents on the estate were lower than ever. She would sit brooding over

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every tradesman's account even for the plainest necessaries, considering whether she could not find a cheaper butcher or green-grocer; then start up and hide the gruesome red book out of sight, and force the smile of welcome into her face when gay visitors were announced brimful of news and vivacity. She could not bear that they should think her less light-hearted and jocular and smart than they. She would not mention such a thing as care, but would prattle of balls, concerts, wedding trousseaux, the latest engagement, anything and everything but the subject which haunted her days and nights; she would send the party away with the careless promise to follow to some place of fashionable resort, 'where Alice had already gone with some friends'; but the same visitors would say to each other as they drove from the door, 'Poor Lady Ainslie, how ill she looks! How different from what she used to look at Robert's Tower.'

And as one and all shrewdly suspected what it was which had wrought the change, and there were among those who came to the lodgings many who had formerly been welcomed to the old Scotch country seat, and as human nature is not so bad but that it has its better points, the Ainslies received the invitations which tided them over the most dreaded months of the year, and which, as we know, saw them in Scotland on the August in question.

We can now perhaps understand, and some of us may even enter into the feelings with which this over-burdened parent beheld something of a chance of better days, in the 'love at first sight'—if such a sentiment in such a breast can be so termed—of her son for Penelope East.

At first, indeed, her satisfaction confined itself simply to the fact that Bob would now be willing to call a halt where a halt was most desirable; but a brief conversation with Lady Carnoustie, during which she learned the solitary circumstance that the young lady was the only daughter of a wealthy Jamaica merchant, opened a field for her imagination which in former days would have been dangerous. She would never have been able to keep her hopes to herself.

But caution had been slowly begotten of many a bitter pain. Again and again she had had to eat her own words, and salve

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the disappointment created by her own over haste; and with a shadowy recollection of there being something inscrutable about the Carnousties in bygone times, she bit her lips to prevent any imprudence which might now have disastrous results. She really dared not continue the engrossing dialogue. She felt as if her thoughts, hopes, and plans, even to the tenants' ball to celebrate the wedding and home-coming, were legible on her face, — and rose to admire the view from the window at the very moment when Lady Carnoustie was deploring Penelope's motherless girlhood, and the indubitable fact that she was a 'London girl.'

A London girl! There never was such luck. It was all that was required for a man of fashion, who had no taste for country-bred misses. A London girl, indeed! Could not Lady Carnoustie see what an admission she had made? But no, Lady Carnoustie and all the Carnousties hated London, and abhorred London society.

Well, well; there was something to be said on both sides. Lady Ainslie, poor and hard bested, was by no means so fond of the metropolis as had been Lady Ainslie, prosperous and at ease; and her last two seasons had been dreary enough for anyone. 'Indeed, I am very tired of London myself!' she now allowed with a sigh.

Bob, however, was known to be of a different opinion, and it was Bob who was the person to be consulted.

With feverish delight she beheld him dart to Penelope's side on the re-appearance of the gentlemen; and throughout the evening, whichever way she looked, and to whomsoever she outwardly directed her attention, she saw only the two figures in the distant recess, and beyond that a bewildering haze of joyful anticipations.

Penelope, on her part, was quite in the humour to be made love to.

Her heart was full and sore, although she did not know it, and would not have believed it; at any rate, it is certain that while resolved upon a match between Redwood and her cousin, she almost hated herself for having projected the idea, and was angry with everyone else for apparently falling in with it.

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Redwood, it is true, did not seem to make much of the present opportunity; but she had Tosh's word for it that he was seriously disposed to come forward; and then had she not deliberately decided that he was the right and proper husband for a girl who was in urgent need of a husband? Mina must be taken care of. There was no saying what she might not do, or stoop to, if left alone with her own sad thoughts through the long, lonely winter months to follow; and considering that she already liked Redwood, and he her, and that the stubborn and usually inaccessible family had been won over, it would have been in Penelope's eyes dastardly to let any trivial *penchant* on her part interfere with her readiness to forward the affair.

Hers was but a passing fancy. She rather liked Mr. Redwood; but what of that? To Mina it might be a matter of life and death, of lifelong happiness or misery. How detestable would be any reluctance on Penelope's part to make all smooth, all as easy as possible for the poor girl who had been so submissive to her authority, shown such a ready penitence for the past, and made such tearful promises for the future!

There is a noble pleasure in self-sacrifice which ofttimes misleads the inexperienced. To pain and hurt oneself for the sake of another seems so grand a thing to do, that in the very smart there lies the balm of self-approbation; and just because it gave my heroine an ache at her heart to consider how best she might work out the scheme she had in hand, she made sure the scheme in itself was all that was worthy and honourable.

Anyway, she was going to *do* it. That was the end of every struggle and internal controversy. She was not going to be turned aside like a weathercock just because Redwood —— what did he mean by stopping short before he was well inside the door and talking to Mr. Soutter, instead of advancing up the room to where Mina and Alice Ainslie were turning over the music, with the look and step of joyful alacrity that Captain Ainslie was displaying towards herself?

She wished he would get on a little faster; be a little more consistent and loverlike.

He would be the better for a lesson, perhaps.

Accordingly, she made room for Ainslie to sit by her in the

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recess; and Felix Merriman, who had meant to have his turn of the beauty after dinner, found himself obliged to be interested in Lady Carnoustie's broken harp-strings, which he had been foolish enough to say he could mend, and which he was now invited to inspect, and all but asked to tackle on the spot.

That, however, he evaded by promising to look in on his way back from the moor the following afternoon; but the delay had been fatal; he was now too late to catch up with the nimble soldier who had opened his batteries anew, and had no intention of permitting anyone but himself to come within range of his fair quarry.

'Mamma, do you know that girl is an heiress?' demanded Alice Ainslie of her mother at bedtime. 'Did you see her and Bob? Does Bob know?'

'Hush, my dear, hush! Yes, I know. Take care, Alice, love. I would not have anyone hear you for the world. And these great rooms'— Lady Ainslie looked apprehensively round —'one never knows who may be hidden about in them.'

'Oh, it's all right,' said Alice, impatiently. 'But, mamma, who told you? When did you find out? *I* only heard just now. And you have always been dying for Bob to fall in love with an heiress.'

'I know, my dear, I know. It is wonderful — quite wonderful. Such a pretty girl, and such charming manners! I am sure she has charming manners, though I did not speak to her except to say "Good-night." But Bob, who is so very particular ——'

'Particular! Hum!'

'You know, Alice, he will not be decently civil to those Ladies Pollard. He says they are so countrified and bumpkinish ——'

'They are very much better mannered as well as better born than most of the girls Bob admires. They are not pretty, and they are not smart; but it is great impudence of Bob to find fault with their manners. I expect they have snubbed him ——'

'Oh, well, my dear, well; what does it matter? That is not what we are talking about. You wished to tell me about this Miss Penelope East. We both see that Bob is *épris* with her,

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and, as far as I could judge, and they were sitting exactly opposite me at dinner, she seemed equally taken with him.'

'She was willing to be flirted with, at any rate.'

'You don't think anything more?' A pang shot through the speaker's heart. 'But why then did you come in as you did just now? You seemed quite full of it; and I must own I too had been thinking — and hoping,' a pause. 'It would be such a great, great thing for us all,' the poor lady murmured at last with a sigh.

'You poor mamma!' The daughter's heart experienced a twinge of pity. 'You do worry about us all; and Bob is a dreadful plague, I know. What did he come on these visits for? It only frets you; and it is so much more difficult to offer ourselves about, when we are such a party. If there had only been us three!'

But this had often been discussed before.

'It may turn out to be the very best arrangement that could have been made,' cried Lady Ainslie, suddenly plucking up spirit. 'Suppose we have brought Bob to this quiet old place, where he is the only young man staying in the house, where he will have no one to interfere with him, and he finds located as one of the family this beautiful and charming heiress, ——'

— 'You do pile it on, mamma; but we must make allowances. *I* don't call this Penelope beautiful, — but she is rather pretty and awfully well dressed. That's good enough for Bob, provided she can talk, and will put up with his talk.'

'Put up? My dear Alice, *everyone* finds your brother pleasant.'

'Oh, he can run on, I know: and I must own he seemed to be having it all his own way to-night.'

'He did indeed,' delightedly.

'But mamma ——' Alice hesitated. 'I do not want to damp you, and I know it is often too bad the way Bob worries and badgers you, and won't do anything for himself, but makes you go to papa for him, and give him your own money, ——'

'No, no, my dear,' terrified. 'Really, Alice, you must not say such things.'

'They are true, all the same; but I won't say them if it

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teases you. And if you are in hopes that Bob may turn over a new leaf, and marry a rich girl, and settle down at Robert's Tower ——'

Lady Ainslie sighed.

'Or even let us get back, if we had no more to pay for him, and no need to continue his allowance,' hinted Alice shrewdly.

'Possibly — yes, indeed — possibly. But oh, my dear, why do you torment me so? First you say one thing, and then the other. One minute you appear as if you really thought something might come of it; and the next you throw cold water on the very idea! How can I possibly tell what you do think?'

'I don't suppose it very much matters what I think. It will not affect anybody.'

'Then why, in Heaven's name, do you look so odd and dubious, as if there were something you could say, if you would? What *is* it? What makes you imagine Penelope was not — not a little — that she was only flirting with Bob?'

'Did you happen to notice Mr. Redwood's face while the flirting was going on?'

'Mr. Redwood? The young shooting man? The tall one?'

'Yes. The good-looking one. He took Mina Carnoustie in to dinner.'

'Ah, yes. Yes, to be sure, I noticed him. I thought that might be another little affair, perhaps.'

Alice smiled. 'I don't think so, mamma.'

'Not? But Mina is still a nice-looking girl, though she has lost her complexion, the bright pink colour she used to have in her cheeks.'

'No pink colour would have done anything for Mina to-night. Mamma, you are not usually blind, but, of course, Mr. Redwood was on your side of the table. Now I, who was just opposite him, had the post of observation. He simply could not take his eyes off Penelope's face.'

Lady Ainslie started.

'Oh yes, I know what I am talking about,' proceeded her daughter, coolly. 'It is quite true what I am telling you. I don't know if Penelope returned the glances, for you see she was out of my range.'

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'She did not. I assure you she did not. She never looked at anyone but Bob.'

'All right, but in the evening there was the same scene over again. Mr. Redwood talked to nobody but the old factor man. But if you noticed, he was standing where he could see straight into the recess, and it seemed to be as much as he could do to keep from betaking himself thither. Mamma, you will be sure to make no remark on this. You won't say anything to the Carnousties? It would never do. I am sure they are touchy people.'

'They are, indeed.'

'Only I thought it was as well to tell you, when you spoke of Bob's having the field all to himself, that there was possibly another young man in the field, and one who is not to be despised either. Bob must hurry up.'

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AN ACCIDENT 'À PROPOS.'

For the next few days nothing worthy of note happened at Carnoustie Castle.

Then just as both hosts and guests were beginning to feel the strain of incessant good behaviour, and to have their confidences and complaints among themselves, an incident occurred to put a new face upon everything.

Captain Ainslie on returning from the moor late one afternoon, stumbled over a loose stone and dislocated his knee-joint.

The odd thing was, (according to Lady Ainslie and her daughter in private), that the accident was genuine.

They would have thought nothing of an opportune illness, or the exaggeration of some trifling mishap; indeed they had been almost prepared for something of the kind by the unusual quiescence of the young man, and the deaf ear he turned towards family consultations regarding the next move. Instead of pes-

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tering his mother with restless inquiries, instead of manifesting any signs of impatience to know the proposed day of departure, he set about the business of the moment as though he had been fixed for ever in the spot where he was, and up to Friday morning nothing had been publicly said about going on the Monday, or even on the Tuesday, according to the programme first laid down.

'We must *offer* to go on Monday, I think,' Lady Ainslie consulted with Alice, the two having retired ostensibly to write letters in their own apartments. 'After the post comes in this afternoon I will go to Lady Carnoustie with a note in my hand, and ask her if she can put up with us till Monday, and murmur something about "to-morrow." If she is cordial — and she is really very cordial and civil, I have never known her so pleasant — I think we might manage to make it Tuesday?' interrogatively. 'What do you think? Do you get on well? Do the girls seem to take to you? Would they be likely to want you to stay?'

'Oh, we get on all right. I should think they would be glad of anyone in this stupid old place. It is not very amusing, but I don't mind it, on the whole. Penelope is some fun.'

'I think it is charming — so peaceful, so beautiful!' poor Lady Ainslie sighed. She had not known three such quiet, comfortable days for long. Her husband and son taken off her hands for the time being, and pursuing the proper avocation of mankind in its proper time and place; Alice sketching and rambling about with two nice young people of her own age and rank; herself free to recline in an easy chair, and ply a lazy tatting shuttle, or occupy the front seat of a handsome barouche, behind a good pair of horses, for the daily drive — it was all luxury to the poor woman. How invigorating were the sea breezes! How appetising the delicious game and fruit at meals!

And Alice was getting sea-bathing — the very thing Alice needed.

There had been no sea-bathing for anyone at Carnoustie Castle before the Ainslies came; but Penelope had seized on the idea suggested by her new companion, and the weather being warm, and the sportsman on the mountain heights, Lady

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Carnoustie was graciously pleased to consider that there would be no harm in the two girls taking their maids, equipped with suitable appliances, and finding a sequestered nook among the rocks on the shore, where they could unobserved disport themselves in the waves.

This was indeed the sort of thing that Lady Carnoustie approved. When Penelope in hot haste, and closely followed by her new friend, burst into the room to prefer their joint request, she had at first been a little inclined to draw in her chin, and think that the eager intruders had forgotten their place, that all-important place which it was her own mission in life to inculcate; but no sooner did she comprehend the nature of the demand, than her brow relaxed.

It was such a simple, natural, child-like petition — and, above all things, she desired her children to be simple, natural, and child-like.

Louisa and Joanna had never cared for sea-bathing, and she had been obliged to order them into the water, and insist upon their not crying, and being all the better for the dip afterwards — in spite of blue lips and shivering. Not until the family doctor had intervened, consequent on a cough on Joanna's part which could not be got rid of — and which together with Louisa's chilblains argued, he explained, a lack of circulation for which bathing, at any rate bathing off the shore, was not desirable — was the ordeal abandoned. And not without considerable reluctance and vexation did Lady Carnoustie consent to perceive that it might be as well never to make a trial in Mina's case. Mina had measles about the time her bathing should have been attended to. The following year she had whooping cough; and the next saw her a delicate, growing girl, and Dr. McWhinnock peremptorily put down his foot upon the project. 'If you wish to kill your daughter, you can do it, my lady,' he had exclaimed with the bluntness of a physician and a favourite; and Lady Carnoustie, to do her justice, never thought a pin the worse of him for it afterwards. She always showed at her best when thus bearded.

But Penelope was now emphatic in her assurance of being strong and hearty; of having the best circulation in the world; of

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having bathed at Folkestone, and at Eastbourne, and at 'hundreds of places' she could not remember where; besides which Alice Ainslie had been used to her daily dip at Robert's Tower, and was 'simply longing to get into the sea again.'

Her mother also vouched for it that invigorating sea-air, and above all sea-bathing, had been recommended by the faculty.

Accordingly, two glorious summer mornings in succession saw the pair set forth joyously, and what with the distance they had to walk, and one thing and another, it was luncheon time and past it ere they re-appeared.

This might have been a misdemeanour, but Lady Carnoustie had taken the bathing under her wing. *She* was the person to whom the laughing mermaids flew for sympathy and congratulation in the adventure; to her was detailed the description of the enchanting little creek discovered among the rocks, and of the crystal pools which the flowing tide had filled on every side; she was assured that the water was warm, delicious — so warm that they could hardly come out of it, — and in the end she was actually called upon to know at what time the tide would be favourable on the following day.

All of this was so much choice flattery, most unconsciously administered. Penelope really felt that her elderly relative had an interest in the proceeding and some perception of its delights; while Alice Ainslie followed her lead, and meeting with more response from the dignified matron than from her obviously unsympathetic offspring, perceived quickly how the land lay. Louisa and Joanna could scarcely hear the name of bathing without a shudder; while Mina confessed the idea had for her no kind of attraction; but Lady Carnoustie, on the other hand, experienced a vague sense of having at last had her opinion of a wholesome exercise endorsed and justified.

About the tide? Well, really she thought the gardeners or the fishermen had better be consulted. She could not take it upon herself to say, but of course the tide did alter every day, and she believed it was usually high tide later one day than another. Penelope, with a queer look, informed her that it was an hour later, (Penelope had never rested until she had made herself mistress of every fact concerning its ebb and flow, from those

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best qualified to impart such knowledge), — and the point was how should they manage about luncheon?

It was only at high tide the creek was available, and the creek was by far the best place to be had, — but then unfortunately it would be some time between twelve and one the next day — the speaker paused, and looked suggestively at her hostess.

'Could you not bathe in the afternoon?' suggested Lady Ainslie, anxious to make all smooth.

'I don't think aunt Carnoustie would approve of that. It is not considered good for people, is it, auntie?' Penelope shook her wet hair out over her shoulders, and sat down with a hearty appetite. 'Alice's hair is dry already, but mine takes such a time,' proceeded she. 'We had to come home with towels over our shoulders, hadn't we, Alice? And we think they must have seen us from the moor, for we could see them quite distinctly, banging away; at one time they were no distance off. They must have seen our white shoulders as we trotted home. Well, auntie, what about to-morrow's bathe? May we have something kept for us, if we come in late for luncheon?'

But Lady Carnoustie had a great idea. Penelope's acuteness in recalling a well-known medical dictum had been just in time. She had actually opened her lips to second Lady Ainslie's proposition, entirely oblivious of what she had in former years been wont to inculcate, and she felt grateful for having been saved from exposing her inconsistency.

'It would indeed be most unwise to go off directly after a meal,' she now observed profoundly, 'and I suppose it would hardly do to wait till later in the afternoon.'

'No good doing that, auntie. If the tide had gone down we should be no better off than if the tide had not come up.'

'Then all I can think of is, that you should take your luncheon with you.'

'And let the maids prepare it on the rocks while we are in the sea! And have it as soon as ever we come out, without all this rushing, hot walk back — and we could sit and rest ourselves, and come home quite slowly afterwards, ——'

'Or we might pick you up for a drive?' said Lady Carnoustie, smiling; and Penelope with a smile in return, after a moment's

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hesitation accepted the offer. Penelope was a very shrewd little woman.

'They speak as if they thought we were going to stay on,' mused Lady Ainslie, resting her pen, which had already begun a sentence descriptive of the pleasure with which the party was anticipating the next visit on the list. 'If I only knew what to do! I never dreamed of Bob's being satisfied to remain beyond Monday at the latest!'

'I thought you had settled it was to be Tuesday. Or was it Monday? You are to offer to go upon Monday and be pressed on to Tuesday.'

'But I should like it to be Wednesday, or even Thursday?'

'Oh, I dare say they'll keep us,' said Alice, coolly. 'We aren't much trouble. And they have nobody coming that I can hear of. I am sure I must be a godsend to Penelope.'

'But I hope you don't neglect the Carnousties.'

Alice laughed. 'Mamma, they are such queer old things; they are a great deal more ancient than you. They are even more ancient than their mother — and that is saying something. Oh, I don't think they mind being neglected. We take Mina about with us sometimes. But we really can't tack on the others.'

'Bob seems to be getting on so well.'

Alice was silent.

'You don't say anything? Do you not consider he is getting on well?'

'I don't think he is making much impression, you know, mamma. Penelope is ready enough to laugh and flirt; I don't know that it is even flirting; she is just the same with Lord Carnoustie and everybody — or at least every man; she is the kind of girl who naturally gets on better with men than with women. There is no harm in it.'

'Harm? Certainly not. I was considered to do the same myself, and yet I never was called a flirt — at least, not a great flirt.'

'I expect you did pretty well, mamma. I always hear about your "flames" and your "dancing partners;" and there are one or two papa is quite cross about to this day.'

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'No; nonsense;' but her mother smiled. 'I am sure if I ever had any — any little coquetry in me, it has all been knocked out by this time;' the smile faded into a sigh. 'If I could only see you all happily provided for!'

'Which means Bob. Yes, mamma, settle Bob, and the rest of us will do very well for ourselves. I own Bob is a caution. And yet, you know,' proceeded Miss Ainslie after a pause, 'it is such a new thing for Bob to be in earnest himself, that it really may be the occasion of his being taken *au sérieux* by Penelope. Bob has proposed to half the girls he knows — or says he has. I am inclined to believe it, for I really think he would find it easier to propose than not; but he has always been quite pleased and relieved after each affair has come to an end, and seems to look upon his having been refused as though he had rounded off the flirtation satisfactorily, and behaved as was expected of him.'

'My dear Alice, how you talk! If it were as you say, he would certainly have been hooked by this time.'

'Oh, he would have been hooked fast enough if there had been anything to hook. But nobody wants him. He has probably told every girl at intervals how poor he is, and what a bad look-out he has — you know his frank, engaging way of blurting out with this, — while at the same time he goes everywhere, never denies himself anything, is always well dressed and well mounted ——'

'Now, my dear Alice, do, pray, let this side of the question alone. There is no need whatever to drag it in. You are never just to your brother. It is very hard upon a young man in his position, heir to a baronetcy, and placed by his father in a smart regiment, to find himself obliged to economise.'

'I don't see that. Why is it harder for him than for us?'

'It *is* harder; I don't know why,' impatiently.

'Simply because we are women and have to put up with it. You, for instance: look at your travelling-trunk and at Bob's! Yours is so old and worn it will hardly hold together. I was quite ashamed to see it put out of the steamboat; and then followed Bob's new leather portmanteau, and gun-case, and ——'

'Alice, you might spare me this. If you really pitied me,

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you would show your pity by trying to help, not by reproaches and railing. You are young, and do not understand ——'

Indistinct protest.

'At any rate, he is really in love now, and who knows what it may do for him?' and Lady Ainslie resolutely set herself to compose her paragraphs and calculate their effect.

This had taken place about twelve o'clock; by five the same afternoon Captain Ainslie was brought home in a dogcart, having been trundled down the hill-path in a wheelbarrow. He really was badly hurt, and made as little of his pain as anybody could.

But he did not wish to rise from the couch to which the doctor ordered him, and submitted to rest and low diet with praiseworthy docility.

Dr. McWhinnock pronounced that the dislocated joint which he had set must remain absolutely immovable for some days; nay, in confidence he told Lady Carnoustie that it might have to be kept so for some weeks to come. It had been an awkward wrench, and though the case was a perfectly straightforward one, he could not take it upon himself to say what time might be required before Captain Ainslie could be as he was before. The captain would certainly have to lie still for a bit. Then he would go about upon crutches, and could be taken out for drives; but as for his mounting the paddle-boxes of steamers and the box-seats of coaches, and careering away on a tour of pleasure all over the Highlands, it was not to be thought of.

Lady Carnoustie looked very grave as she listened.

Then McWhinnock, understanding the gravity, pressed her closer. He owned the accident was unfortunate and inconvenient. No doubt the captain was already fretting over the amount of annoyance he was causing, and provoked with himself for being the cause of disarranging everyone's plans, — but the poor young gentleman could not help it. Anyone might stumble over the stones on the moors. They were one mass of loose stones, as her ladyship knew. He had heard authorities say that nowhere in Scotland was the glacial development more extraordinary than in the island, and naturally a stranger would not step as carefully as one who knew the place. Then the worthy doctor started afresh.

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Lord Carnoustie, he affirmed, had been very huffy both with Captain Ainslie for falling, and with himself for saying it was easy to fall on his lordship's moor; but her ladyship would be more reasonable, more ready to allow that the hill-side was not as smooth walking as it looked.

'Oh, I have always said there were dangerous places,' said she.

'Just so. Your ladyship has observed that? So I thought. I told Captain Ainslie that some of us — meaning your ladyship — had often remarked upon the dangerous footing. Lord Carnoustie takes it for certain that everyone is as sure of foot as himself.'

But what Lady Carnoustie wanted to know was not whether or not the patient had been to blame in the first instance, but for how long she should have him on her hands now. As far as she could gather, there was no chance of Captain Ainslie's being well enough to leave with the rest early in the following week, and what if they insisted on waiting for him?

By this time she was beginning to have had enough of her visitors. They were not offensive; they were one and all doing their best to be accommodating, — indeed, no people to be there at all, could have been less burdensome. But what was all very well for a short and fixed limit of time, might turn into a prospect too terrible to contemplate, if its horizon were dim and distant.

For a few mornings she had found herself quite able to sit up in state over her wool-work, with Lady Ainslie ensconced at the other end of the sofa; to take her for a drive in the afternoon, and a turn in the garden before dinner; and, being in very fair health at the time, she had rejoiced in being thus able to do her part in hospitality. She had devoted herself to her guest, according to old-fashioned ideas on the subject; never left her alone for a minute of the day, save during the single hour which etiquette permitted for the writing of supposititious letters, and prepared herself heroically for the fatigue of each evening's elaborate toilette, and the later hours which it was thought requisite to keep under the circumstances.

Ordinarily, she rarely remained in the drawing-room after ten

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o'clock, but it was a full hour later every night before she rose on the rare occasions when company of consequence was being entertained at the castle.

To go on with all this? And that not for one, two, or three days more, but indefinitely? Lady Carnoustie called her elder daughters into her private sitting-room, and frankly owned she could not do it.

Louisa and Joanna were quite sure she could not. It would be far too much for dear mamma. She would herself be knocked up next.

Dear mamma then put it to them — Could Captain Ainslie remain behind, and let the others depart?

The docile pair glanced at each other, and their leader's foot began to tap the floor. What were they waiting for? Surely they could give a plain answer to a plain question? Why should Captain Ainslie not stay? The sisters' brows cleared, and, perceiving simultaneously what was expected of them, they hastened to assure the speaker that, strange and peculiar as such a course might be, it was open.

'You think he could stay?'

They thought so; they really thought so.

'We could hardly let him go,' proceeded Lady Carnoustie. 'That is to say, I do not suppose he *could* go. But it is very awkward; it is very tiresome. And Dr. McWhinnock looks at me as if he thought I were some cruel monster, merely because I do not jump at the idea and am not transported with delight! I wonder how Dr. McWhinnock would like to have a young man laid up at *his* house — especially such a flighty young man as this Captain Ainslie? I — I —— upon my word, it is exceedingly troublesome.'

But, troublesome or not, she came to the conclusion that it would be a vast deal preferable to have Bob by himself than Bob with father, mother, and sister in addition.

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CHAPTER XXXVIII.

BOB, BY HIMSELF.

SIMPLE, however, as such a decision was when arrived at in family conclave, it proved to be by no means so easy to carry into effect, as many a host and hostess will understand.

Guests who have been welcomed with effusion, who like their quarters, and find that no one else is expected consequent on their departure, are often more than a match for their entertainers when it comes to a tussle on the point. Are they to go on a certain date or not?

There is no earthly reason why they should go, except that they have stayed long enough, according to the views of the latter, and these views, hospitality sternly demands should be kept in the background.

Wherefore, when the half-hearted suggestion has been met by the faint demur or the ill-assumed regret, the real tug-of-war begins.

'No, really, we have trespassed long enough. You must be quite tired of us by this time,' protests Madame Guest. (N.B. — Be sure it is the women who have this part of the work to do.)

'Not at all. Pray do not think of such a thing. Only we must not keep you all to ourselves. We must not detain you from more amusing places,' murmurs Madame Host.

Madame Guest then assures her that no spot on earth can be more amusing, more *congenial* than Hum-drum Deadly-Dulness, where she only wishes she had not already paid her delightful visit, &c., &c.

Madame Host (rather scared) is *so* pleased, *so* rejoiced that she and hers have been able to do a little for their kind friends, and next time they will endeavour to have a few others to meet them; and she does hope Madame Guest will not be so long again in coming to Hum-drum Deadly-Dulness, &c., &c.

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Really Madame Guest can hardly say. Life is so uncertain. It may be years before such another happy meeting can be arranged. (This is meant to suggest: 'Keep us now, and perhaps we will let you off in the future. "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush."'

If Madame Host has a tolerable amount of backbone she will, however, reject this bait and maintain a resolute silence, and then the more subtle test of the angler's skill is called into play.

'How many posts a day do you have, dear?'

Usually the answer will be: 'Two. One in the morning and one in the afternoon.'

'Oh, then there is still a possibility?' Half-audible murmur, as though to herself.

Madame Host, if quick-witted, is on the alert in an instant, and declines to inquire into the meaning of the 'possibility.' She has a shrewd idea that it will land her in quicksands. There have been lamentations earlier in the day over the non-arrival of some important document.

Instead, she now starts on a lengthy dissertation regarding postal arrangements, from them digresses to parcel posts, sixpenny telegrams, half-penny cards, and Mr. Gladstone. Mr. Gladstone reached, she is safe for the time being.

It signifies little to her that Madame Guest is *distrait* and unresponsive. She only desires to tide over the evil interview, and bring it to a close under the impression on both sides that the hour of departure is to remain fixed.

Fortune favouring her, she may, if she be a clever woman and well up to her business, achieve this end. But alas! Fortune is more apt to jeer and point the finger than to render aid under the circumstances; and Madame Guest is not far wrong in holding on like grim death to the chance of something or other turning up which shall compel the proffered renewal of hospitality.

In nine cases out of ten this will be wrung out of the male contingent of the party. 'Hang it all!' say they. 'What could we do? The poor people have nowhere else to go, and we only meant to be civil, when they caught us up, and — and — it wasn't our fault, anyway.'

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Thus in the case before us, when the unfortunate Lady Carnoustie, at some violence to her own feelings, had let hint after hint go by, and had even contrived to be busy and deaf to Lady Ainslie's lively astonishment and regret, expressed aside to her daughter over the unfortunate change of route which would have to be made, consequent on the result of a letter received, and which was handed ostentatiously to Alice to read, it was Lord Carnoustie — Lord Carnoustie who was sick to death of his visitors, with the exception of Bob, who suited him by sheer force of contrast, and whose whimsical affectations and anecdotes were diverting — it was he who made all his wife's precautions of none effect.

Perceiving that the women were invincible, and that even Penelope, whilst she showed genuine regret for the loss of her new companion — indeed the little weathercock had whirled round, and was now full of Alice Ainslie and of a new piece of fun into which Alice had initiated her, namely, riding about all over the country on the broad-backed Shetland ponies belonging to the home farm — perceiving, we say, that even Penelope could only groan into Alice's ear, not daring to give vent to what she felt by so much as a syllable (a syllable, at least, which could be utilised), the hapless dowager, divining that in the bluff old lord himself lay her only hope, threw her last die.

She hardly expected any good to accrue from it. She was half afraid of Carnoustie, mistaking for pride and ill-humour what was in reality a mixture of shyness and awe on his part. He had a great opinion of women of the world such as herself. He did not like them; he did not feel at ease with them. But although he had lived for so long out of society, he had lingering recollections of the gay whirl without his gates, which made him anxious not to be despised by the votaries of fashion. Indeed, he had a far greater respect for a giddy dame of quality, or for a smart, feather-pated youth who was the rage for the time being, than Lady Carnoustie at all approved.

'Why should we mind what people of that stamp think?' she had loftily observed when her husband somewhat uneasily suggested cutting short the long sermon and prayers in vogue at

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the castle on Sunday evenings. 'You yourself say the Ainslies are not religious ——'

'Well, neither are we.'

'Carnoustie!'

'We're not — not particularly. We never set up to be. Hoots! We do well enough; but if we were really religious people, like some people I know, we would be very different from what we are. Well, well,' perceiving indignant remonstrance on her brow, 'well, well; maybe *you* are — or you think yourself so, because you give away a wheen[1] books and tracts, and go to church, and to sacrament, and pick out the longest sermons you can find for me to read while you sleep; — but I know what *I* call religion. My mother — rest her soul! was a religious woman. How she taught us, prayed with us, set us an example! All the countryside reverenced her — she fed them, doctored them, visited every house within her reach — the poor blessed her name — ay, and not the poor only, Carnoustie Castle was a house of God in those days; the fame of it was known throughout the length and breadth of Scotland. God help me! I'm an unworthy son of such a mother;' and, to the infinite consternation of his amazed spouse, the old man's voice had broken, and his grey head had sunk upon his breast.

Lady Carnoustie had been unable to utter a word. By-and-by she had crept away to her closet more humbled and shaken than she had been for years; and thereafter and for some time subsequently her speech was gentler, and her decisions less hard and dictatorial, than any had remembered them before.

It had cut her to the soul to be told the truth in her husband's homely, unsparing words.

She had taken not only her own piety, but that of all the family and household for granted. She abhorred the pleasures and pursuits of the world; she turned her back upon every form of dissipation; she shrank from fashionable society. On the other hand, she was strict in exacting from one and all beneath her sway conformity to religious observances, and woe betide the child or the servant who sought to evade them; she

[1] 'Few.'

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ordered largely from tract societies, and though she did not herself peruse the literature with which the house was thus supplied, she had it lying about, and anyone who asked could have; and she lay on her sofa and lamented that other matrons and maids were not as she and her daughters.

But that, of course, was not as Lady Carnoustie saw it. Indeed, she had, as we say, taken her piety in a *ça va sans dire* fashion.

To have her husband all at once turn upon her, and compare her with his mother! Her bosom swelled 'twixt wounded pride and startled discomfiture. It was too bad of Carnoustie, —and yet she felt with an inner perturbation and trembling that he who had thus smote her in the tenderest point had passed beyond the reach of her displeasure, and that there was in his plain dealing an earnestness and a disregard of consequences which could have been induced by no ordinary conviction. And he had told her that she slept whilst he read! Now, it was a fact that her ladyship, who was no reader, nor yet listener, never could keep properly awake during the Sunday lecture, and was for ever catching herself dozing off, and wondering whether anyone else had caught her. She felt that she could never dare again to let herself go, and accordingly not a word did she say when Carnoustie, with an inkling of how the land lay, pursued hot-foot the advantage he had gained.

'I think I'll just go on with this book. I like it better than yon,' he remarked easily, after the Sunday which became known in family annals thereafter as 'The Ainslie Sunday,' and though he spoke boldly, and looked full in her face as he did so, she only replied, 'Very well, my dear;' a piece of acquiescence over which the recreant had many a secret chuckle. 'I should have taken her in hand sooner,' he told himself.

This is not so much of a digression as it may seem to our readers. We wish it to be comprehended how at this especial moment Lord Carnoustie was riding with a high hand in the family, also why his wife did not care to pass animadversions on his respectful aversion to his principal lady visitor, and call him over the coals to be at once more civil and less yielding.

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His plan was to give himself as little trouble as he could about Lady Ainslie, while at the same time resolute that everyone else should be at her beck and call.

'Whatever you do, don't have her going away and saying we live in a beggarly way and don't know the fashions, and are *behindhand*, and all that,' he cried; for he and nurse Alison had this in common, that each yearned to be thought *à la mode*, though the old nurse was so far ahead of her master that she would have been really happy to be so, while the moil and trouble of it would have been intolerable to him, and he only coveted the semblance. 'Stick up to her, all of ye! Talk scandal, and trumpery, and let her think ye're as well up to all the London trash as she and her set. Don't drag the *Soutters* into the conversation. There is no need to say anything about the Soutters. Very worthy people; but Lady Ainslie won't care to be bothered with such as them; and she will stare if we have nobody to talk about but my factor and his sisters. There's Redwood — cram Redwood down her throat. There is no need for her to know he is only here for a few months, or so. Make as much as ye can of him and that friend of his — though, between ourselves, Merriman's a vulgarish fellow. I had not noticed him before the other night; but when he came out in talk after dinner, and I looked at him with Sir Robert's eyes, and still more with the eyeglass of the Bob creature, I saw we were wrong in having him; not that we could help ourselves; we could not have left him out of the invitation; but it was a pity it happened so. Redwood has him because he is a good shot, of course; and that's what we must make Lady Ainslie understand. For all her fine ladyisms, she has the sense to know that many a man gets an invitation in the shooting season who would never be thought of out of it.'

He had himself instructed her ladyship on the point and found her more than amiable. He was not to know that he might have said anything with equal impunity; that the wildest statements and most perplexing arguments would have received her assenting smile, so long as he would offer her a ready arm in to dinner, and bid her a cheery 'Good-night' at the close of

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the evening, and each day talk of something to be done or seen on the next.

She was perfectly right in surmising that such planning was not accidental, that it was a delicate way of saying 'Our house is still at your disposal, and shall be so till you of your own free will abandon it;' and accordingly, as long as she dared, she tacitly accepted the position. But at length the moment had come when something must be said, and it was, as our readers know, only a few hours before Captain Ainslie's opportune accident that mother and daughter decided to break the spell.

There is no need to dwell on the varied feelings and secret consultations to which the new turn of affairs gave rise.

They may be surmised by all; suffice it to say that each party had to make certain concessions, but that at length the sturdy dictum of that arbiter of fate, the doctor, brought the situation to a close in a manner fairly satisfactory to all.

Dr. McWhinnock bluntly told his patient that he must remain where he was and as he was for some weeks to come; and turning to Lady Ainslie, who stood by, as unceremoniously informed her that it would be nonsense for herself or any of her family to put themselves out by staying on at Carnoustie Castle, for that 'the captain' would be far better left quietly behind to complete his cure without so many fussing round him.

'The captain' grinned as the doctor spoke.

'You tramp to-morrow, mater,' he remarked, placidly.

'Yes, oh, certainly; we could not wish to inflict ourselves a day longer on our kind friends than is absolutely necessary,' replied she, scarcely knowing whether to be pleased or rueful. 'Indeed, I am quite ashamed already. We have been here ten days as it is,' (this was to remind her hearers that they had not been longer), — 'ten days is quite a visitation; but then, one has to make such an effort to get to these out-of-the-way places, and one can come so seldom — still, of course, we are being anxiously expected elsewhere; so that if I am really assured we can be spared from my poor son's side;' and the lady assumed an interrogative accent, and addressed herself to the doctor with impressiveness.

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'Ye can be spared pairfetly, my leddy. 'Deed, to speak plain truth, he'll do best withoot ye,' rejoined Dr. McWhinnock in his broadest, driest accent. Then he paused and remarked meditatively, 'There's a good boat to-morrow at noon.'

CHAPTER XXXIX.

'DON'T YOU EVER SPOON?'

If the worthy speaker had got his cue from Lady Carnoustie, or any member of the Carnoustie family, at any rate he never betrayed as much.

He was loyal to them — loyal as John Soutter himself; and however flattering it might have been to his professional vanity, and however great might have been the rise of his importance in the popular estimation had he decided to keep the Ainslies on from day to day hanging on his decisions and unable to move till he had given permission, it is but due to McWhinnock to say that as soon as he could honestly aver there was nothing the matter with the wounded joint which time would not set to rights, he was really anxious to further what he knew to be the wishes of his old friends and patrons.

'I understand, Lady Carnoustie. You are just feeling you could manage the son, but not the whole set of them. I understand. Well, if the captain is as well as I expect to find him to-day' — (he had been caught before paying his daily visit to the sick chamber), — 'there is no airthly reason why anyone should stay on his account another hour, and so I'll tell Sir Robert, or whoever is there. I'll set them bumming.'

When he came back and announced what he had done, he felt he deserved the approving glance which took the place of a smile on Lady Carnoustie's face.

She did not say anything. It was not Dr. McWhinnock's 'place' to be admitted to her confidence, but she addressed him in her most gracious accents; and when he further assured

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her that he would look in on the following day just before the travellers departed, adding, 'And I have recommended the noon-day boat, my lady; so I'll be here about eleven,' she was moved to give his hand a cordial and almost significant pressure, and went nearer to betraying the joy of her heart than she had any idea of doing.

It may be wondered why so simple an expedient as that of summoning others to fill her guest chambers had not presented itself to our hostess, but the truth was, it would not have been easy to find people who could thus be summoned to Carnoustie Castle at a minute's notice. According to Lord Carnoustie, they would have 'smelt a rat.' 'We never ask anyone in that free and easy way, so it is no use beginning now,' he averred. 'No one we care for, but would feel affronted by such a queer sort of invitation. Of course there are some who would *come*,' after a pause; 'when you have shooting to offer, and you are not particular as to whom you offer it, you will always find people ready to *come*, but then what if we did not find them ready to *go*? It would be out of the mud into the mire if, just as we had got rid of these Ainslies, we found ourselves in the same hobble over again!'

Then again the accommodation at the castle was too large for a single stranger, or even a few strangers, to make any difference. There was a whole corridor of spare apartments, and only by filling them all could Lady Ainslie's 'But you must have others coming' be met to any purpose. Divers guests were indeed expected later on, but as it happened those next in order had cancelled their engagement, nothing could be done.

Now, however, all was to be forgotten and forgiven.

By that time on the following day the old place would be itself again; all the torments and trammels of the past ten days would be over; and if only the Ainslies were not about to leave a hostage behind — but to Lady Ainslie the hostage had to be spoken of in a different tone.

'He will be well taken care of, I assure you. And Hyslop shall attend to him, so you must not think of leaving Sir Robert's valet behind,' (Sir Robert who had long ceased to have a valet when at home, had been provided with one for his round of

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visits). 'Hyslop is very attentive,' proceeded Lady Carnoustie, keeping to safe topics, 'and he is so quiet; he is just the person to be about an invalid.'

She promised that Mr. Redwood should be made free of the sick room. Having no son, she would do her best to find poor Captain Ainslie a companion in the only young man about the place, and she had heard Mr. Redwood tell Lord Carnoustie he would look in whenever he could; Mr. Soutter, too, would take Captain Ainslie newspapers and what news he could. It would be dull, she was afraid; very dull; at any rate until the invalid could be moved to a sitting-room, or join the family downstairs; but Dr. McWhinnock was to borrow a carrying chair, which would be a great thing; and the utility of such a conveyance, and the wisdom and the obligingness of Dr. McWhinnock were dwelt upon; and, considering all things, Lady Carnoustie behaved very well, and did not look half the annoyance she felt at being obliged to harbour for an indefinite period a chance invalid, and even to provide for his amusement and recreation.

'But what *are* we to do with him?' she put the question to all assembled, when the last puff of smoke had disappeared from the retreating steamer, and it was certain that neither wind nor tide, nor any ill turn of the patient, could prevent the desired departure from taking place. 'It is certainly a great relief that they are gone; but we must not forget that he is still here,' looking round with her usual air of solemn wisdom.

'Troth, and he is little likely to let you forget it,' observed her husband, drily. 'You can hear him now — or you could if you were in my dressing-room — twanging away on that banjo of his. He's as pleased as Punch with himself for sending for it; and he kept me for an hour this morning explaining and expounding.'

'Does he play well, uncle?' The eager question was Penelope's, of course. No one else cared how Bob Ainslie played.

'Does he play well, uncle?' Lord Carnoustie's brow twitched, and his eye twinkled. 'That's all you think about, missy, I'll be sworn. How can I tell if he plays well? Well or ill, he'll be at it day and night, I foresee. Well, poor fellow, if it amuses him,' relaxing. ''Tis a droll harebrained creature; but I must say he's good company — better company than Redwood. Red-

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wood's uncommonly dull to shoot with. He was well enough before the shooting began; but whether it's the Ainslies, or what it is, I can't think. He hasn't a word for one of us on the moor.'

When he came out of Captain Ainslie's room, on the other hand, Lord Carnoustie would declare he had never met with a more diverting fellow. If half the things had really happened which Bob said had happened to himself, he must have had the most comical experiences man ever had. And he told them so whimsically, so naturally, was so pleasantly unconscious of anything at all remarkable in his narratives, that it added to the charm of every anecdote and adventure. 'You won't be sorry when he comes down stairs, I can tell you,' he would sum up in conclusion; and one of his hearers openly protested that she should be the reverse of sorry.

'I do want to hear that banjo,' said Penelope.

Penelope was again rather lonely and out of sorts, lacking something, she knew not what.

The companionship of a chattering girl of her own age, the fun of bathing, and hill-riding, and the novelty of having something to look forward to in the return of the sportsmen from the moor every evening, together with Captain Ainslie's eager and obvious admiration, had all combined to win her from herself and keep her in a little flutter of excitement and gratified vanity during the past ten days.

Music had been inaugurated in the evenings. Bob Ainslie had one of those sweet, easy, baritone voices which no one can help listening to, and an ear which enabled him to pick up every tune he heard. He would declare he could not sing; by Jove, he could not sing a note; he had never been taught; he could only squall; but if they had not heard such-and-such an air, he would squall it for them with pleasure; it was such a jolly air; it was too bad that they should not have heard it; and thereupon the speaker would lift up his voice, and with a smile upon his face troll forth some pleasant melody in such artless, jocular fashion that it would seem a very jest to be touched thereby, while yet the close never found his audience anything but mute.

Bob was used to this effect. When he essayed to sing, he

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was never shut up by the unceremonious messmates who objected to his conversation. They were proud of his singing. 'You should just hear Ainslie of ours sing that,' they were wont to confide to mothers and sisters struggling with the intricacies of the latest opera success. 'Ainslie had it after a couple of nights; and we have made him give it us every evening since. You don't sing it a bit like him.'

Whereupon would ensue a protest from the fair one. 'I am only *learning*. Of course no one can sing a difficult song till they have learnt it. And those runs are so very *difficult*. They need such a lot of *practising*.'

But Ainslie's brother officers knew that he never practised, and that nothing would induce him to learn any mortal thing.

He was always cheerful, always ready to oblige; would lilt away for them if they asked; but 'Call it singing?' The only time he was ever known to be ruffled on the subject was when his mother wanted him to exhibit at her own or her friends' drawing-room concerts. Probably he was musical enough to know wherein he fell short, and what training and cultivation might have done for him; and, as he had no intention of mending his deficiencies, he preferred the simpler method of ignoring in public the powers he had.

With what surprise and delight, therefore, had the poor long-suffering parent heard the first strains of a well-known air gently warbled on the second evening at Carnoustie Castle! The long drawing-room was perfect as a music hall; and the small and somewhat staid party formed a breathlessly attentive audience. Even Lady Carnoustie was moved to say 'I had no idea your son was musical,' in accents almost of reproach.

For Lady Carnoustie was thinking Captain Ainslie ought to have sung on the previous night — the dinner-party night — and helped off an evening which had somewhat dragged, instead of sitting behind the window curtains whispering with Penelope.

Bob's mother, however, was eager with her exculpation. Bob himself could not have disclaimed his vocal talent more earnestly as regarded a public performance; and the speaker had the advantage of being further able to insert a compliment to his modesty. 'He never *will* sing in any mixed assemblage, my

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dear Lady Carnoustie. He is always sure that some one is present who sings much better and knows much more about it than he does. He will not allow me to *ask* him, when we are in town. Indeed, I am quite *surprised* at his consenting to-night; it must have been your daughter, or your — ahem — niece; among them they have overcome his scruples.' And the poor exultant woman fanned her flushed cheeks, and leaned back in her chair, resisting her great desire to join the applauding circle and beg for the songs she knew best showed off the singer's voice.

Even Lord Carnoustie had awakened from a nap humming a refrain which, falling softly on his ear, roused him from his dreams. Even he had wheeled his great chair half round, and nodded and patted his hands in time to the next ditty.

As for the young people, they were honestly enchanted. Louisa, who had opened the piano and executed a dreary ballad, in dutiful response to her mother's 'May we have a little music, my dear?' was now by common consent deposed from the music stool; and Captain Ainslie, sometimes on, sometimes off, occasionally touching a few notes of accompaniment, but more often with his fingers in his pockets, facing the circle with the half smile which deprecated the whole thing as an art performance on his face, held all five spell bound. All five we say advisedly, for Alice Ainslie was for once willing to add her quota to the general appreciation. She could see that Penelope's eyes were glistening.

Penelope was letting herself go. She had seized on the idea of being amused, diverted, and occupied by this man, and it was such a wonderful thing to find that he was meeting her more than half way, that she could not be grateful enough. His singing was heavenly. She called for all the opera airs she loved best, and he sang them without a moment's hesitation. He was the most amiable of favourites. Even his sister, when she begged for a vulgar street song, was accommodated, and the street song was voted charming by all the group; and Lady Carnoustie, not catching the words in the distance, thought it must be one of Madame Dolby's beautiful sacred solos which she had heard at an oratorio when in Edinburgh the year before.

It was, therefore, no wonder that the strains of the hidden

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banjo should have sounded tantalising when emanating from the sick chamber, where the invalid now lay all day long on the sofa, wringing every drop of comfort he could out of the couple of French novels which by luck had been popped into his portmanteau, and wondering how soon, now that his people had been fairly routed, he could manage to get himself transferred to another room and other society than his own.

Lord Carnoustie and Redwood were his only visitors, and he did not set much store by either of them.

Of the two he preferred Carnoustie. Carnoustie had not much to say, but he was a ready listener, and though his shrewd, humorous countenance indicated without much attempt at reticence that he did not believe a tithe of Bob's absolutely-true-because-they-happened-to-myself experiences, he exhibited an amused tolerance, and even an appetite for more, which was all the young man wanted, and, truth to tell, more than he often got.

With Redwood it was different; Redwood was a desperately dull visitor. He usually came in at the close of the day, and, having had many hours on the moor, it was reasonable to suppose he was tired, and disinclined for further exertion. But when a man has taken the trouble to turn out and drive a couple of miles to do a neighbourly kindness, and has got through that, the troublesome part of the business, one would think he would rather be inclined to enjoy his coffee and his cigar, and the chat of a companion who knew people he knew, and the mode of life he was accustomed to: instead of which, Redwood mooned, and at the end of half an hour fidgeted.

'I dare say you want to be off,' said poor Bob. He had not spoken — to call speaking — to a soul that day, and was now lying stretched comfortably on the sofa, sipping his coffee, and enjoying the blaze of the bright little fire, and the odours of a great bunch of late roses sent in from the garden. Invalidism was endurable at such a moment, and would Redwood have settled down, and made himself at home — better still, if he would have brought over a pack of cards in his pocket — they might have had not only this but many a merry evening.

'Oh, ah, yes; I wish I had brought the cards,' said Redwood. Anything was better than hearing Bob Ainslie rave

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about 'the pretty heiress,' and being asked to take her messages, and plied with interrogations.

At the first Bob had demanded, 'You are not "on" there yourself, Redwood? Of course not. I saw that at once — on the first night you were here; so it's all square.' And thereupon had wanted to know this and that, and to confide his own hopes and aspirations, and learn, if possible, what Redwood thought of his chances, until Redwood, by turns amused, contemptuous, and infuriated, had answered so shortly and let the subject drop so quickly that the other had formed his own conclusions. 'Met with a snub,' he had told himself astutely.

He was a little surprised that a man like Redwood should have been snubbed. 'He is a gloomy beggar, and not much in him; but he has a fairish face and a thundering smart figure. 'Gad, I wish I had half his inches. It just shows how little that kind of thing tells with a girl. What a girl wants is to be amused and flattered. If I had been in Redwood's shoes, camped close by, and with not a human being to interfere, see if I should not have been engaged by this time.'

But Redwood had evidently missed his opportunities, and there was no more to be said. After about half an hour in the invalid's room on the evening in question, Redwood, as we have said, began to wonder how soon he could get away, and the wonder was visible on his countenance.

'It is awfully good of you to have turned out after a long day's work,' said Ainslie, half rising to extend a rueful hand. 'Of course, I know you must want to be off to bye-bye. Will you go into the drawing-room, or will you send for your trap to come to this side door, and slip off? It's easily done. There's the bell,' indicating.

'I'll go into the drawing-room for a minute,' said Redwood. 'They are old-fashioned people, and particular. They might think it cool if I went in and out by a side door.'

'As you like. You'll see the fair Penelope then. Mind you tell her I am gettin' up a lot of new songs to sing to her when I am let loose from this prison cell. Tell her I mean to make that old doctor let me out to-morrow, and she must go at him too, and back up the idea. Tell her ——'

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'When is all this to be told?'

'When? Why, now. Now, when you go downstairs. Did you not say you were goin' in to see them all?'

'You want me to deliver your messages before the assembled party, with every eye upon me, and every ear on the stretch ——'

'Oh, bother it!' said Ainslie, laughing; 'don't tell me a fellow like you can't find his opportunity. No, dash it! not exactly before the Carnousties *en bloc*. That would hardly do. But Penelope is often a little on one side; she and I used to retire to a window, ——'

'And you suggest that now she and I should?'

'Eh!' said Bob.

There was a gleam in the other's eye which prompted the involuntary ejaculation. He did not know what to make of the look, it almost seemed as if Redwood — could Redwood be playing him a trick?

The next moment dispelled the idea. 'I don't think I am in the window line,' quoth Redwood, drily. 'Girls don't invite me, and I don't of myself suggest it.'

'Don't you ever — ah — spoon?'

There was a moment's pause, then, 'No,' said Redwood, with a drawl.

'You weren't the fellow, then, who came a cropper — I thought you couldn't be, but the name was the same — last May? Oh, I say, I'm beastly sorry,' for there was no mistaking the dark flush which all in a moment suffused the face before him. 'I say, you know, Redwood, I would not have said that for the world; but, to tell the truth, the first evenin' here I thought I had heard some story or other about you, and racked my brains to recollect what it could be. After a bit it came back to me, and I asked if you were the man; but nobody seemed to know anythin' about it.'

'You asked the Carnousties?'

'I asked Penelope.'

'What did she say?' said Redwood, looking out of the window.

'She had never heard a word of it. I'm awfully sorry, you

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know, if I have said anythin' unpleasant to you,' and Captain Ainslie glanced with a certain dubious timidity towards the averted face. 'It was your sayin' you never spooned put me off the scent. Tell me the story now, like a good fellow,' he added coaxingly. 'Here, sit down for a moment,' kicking a chair towards Redwood with the leg which was still available. 'Sit down and tell us about it.'

Now this was just what no living soul had ever before asked the jilted lover to do, and what he would have been the better for doing long ago.

Everyone had sheered off the subject. At the first they had hustled it out of sight in a breath — despatched it in a single sentence; while, subsequently, the silence of the grave had closed over the affair. Time had indeed done its work, and as we know, Redwood had begun to forget, and to take hold of life afresh; but there would always have been a sore spot somewhere, or, to be exact, a much sorer spot than there was, if little Bob Ainslie had not inserted his finger and thumb into the place, and plucked out the heart of the festering wound.

'That *all?*' said he, when an hour had passed, and the recital had been heard throughout its stages and variations. 'Why, Good Heavens! it's the best joke imaginable. No, no; I don't mean that of course, Redwood; what rot I'm talkin'; but I say, you need not have been such a — I am surprised you should cut short your season in town, and throw off your friends and — and — everythin', and bolt to this out-of-the-way place, and live here all by yourself — quite melodramatic — because of a little *affaire du cœur!*'

'Is that how it strikes you?' said Redwood seriously.

'Very much how it strikes me, and other people too, I should say.'

'They don't — don't think the worse of a fellow for it?'

'Goodness gracious, no! If one were to begin with that, which of us could throw a stone at the other? I don't suppose there's a man in our regiment who has not been thrown over by some girl. Some of us go through it every season regularly. Fact. You need not look so incredulous. Why, I'll tell you now what happened to myself, so you may believe it's true. I was

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engaged to a girl, not a bad girl — but I rather disliked her; however, I thought I had better be engaged to her, because I had no one else. Well, if you'll believe me, when another girl turned up that I was gone upon directly — an awfully jolly girl *she* was — the first one wouldn't jilt me! No, she wouldn't. I never had to work at anythin' in my life as I had to make that obtuse creature see what she had to do. Of course it wasn't for me to break with her; and she should have seen how fairly I was actin' trying to get her to break with me. But not a bit of her. It regularly worried me. Men used to come up and say, "How are you gettin' on, Ainslie? No nearer the *grand coup* yet?" And I had just to grin and bear it. Well, at last it got so bad that I had to give in, and have them both, for I couldn't wait; then when it could do no sort of good, it all came out, and both of them jilted me at once! There now, what do you think of that? Your affair was nothing to that. Everyone knew how I had been wantin' that fool of a girl to tire of me, and take up with some other man, and how infernally stubborn she had been — (though she wasn't a bad sort either, and when I met her abroad after a bit we got quite friendly again, and even did a bit of spoonin' — with care, you know — I wasn't going to let it get too far again when I saw what a leech that girl was) — but I tell you all this just to show that you are safe enough. No one will think the worse of you, especially if — what do you think of this Carnoustie girl now? Mina. She's had her admirers too; and I fancy you might do worse. Of course I'm not sayin' she is a patch upon Penelope; but, then, as you are not gone upon Penelope ——'

'I'm not thinking of either of them, thanks.'

'Aren't you? They think you are.'

'Who thinks so?' Redwood turned round quickly. It is a fact that even Bob Ainslie's most palpable and elaborate romances failed to convey to a new companion any conception of his marvellous powers. He needed to be known as he was known in his family or in his regiment to be appreciated at his true value. Novices would still suppose there must be *something* in what he said, some foundation for his aërial structures, and Bob was accustomed to this, and the quick demand of his present

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companion was therefore quite foreseen. 'Who thinks so? Well, I can't quite say who *thinks* so, but I can tell you — in confidence — who *said* so,' he replied leisurely. 'My little friend Penelope.'

Redwood was silent.

'Mind you, it was only her own idea. She was talkin' as girls will, and she said — I can't tell you the exact words, but she let me see she thought you were *épris* with Mina? Well? Would it do? What d'ye say?' pausing between each word.

'I am sincerely obliged to her,' said Redwood, with a bitterness he could not repress, 'and — and — and, if I have the chance, I will give her your messages to-night,' rising to depart. 'Good-bye, I'm not sorry we talked, and I have told you nothing,' with a faint smile, 'which you are under orders to keep to yourself. In fact, I thought my story was known to everyone until I came down here; I am glad, on the whole, they know it now; after your telling Penelope, she would go to them with it, full cry, no doubt. Well,' after a pause, 'well; I'm off,' and the two shook hands, and each wondered of what the other was thinking.

CHAPTER XL.

MISS MARIANNE SOUTTER PLAYS CRIBBAGE AT LAST.

'MARIANNE!'

Marianne Soutter and her sister were together, after the early meal which was either luncheon or dinner with them, according as it suited John. If John were to be out late, they dined early, and a single savoury dish, hot and appetising, would make its appearance from the kitchen at whatever hour the master of the house appeared; but if there were nothing to detain the factor, he could be back from his ordinary round about six o'clock. The sisters, however, had always a meal of some sort at mid-day, and were usually at leisure after it to stroll out on the grass plot in front on a fine afternoon, and interchange ideas.

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'Marianne, I do think we ought to go and call at the castle.'

'I declare, Jean, I have been thinking so too. The Ainslies have been gone a week, and we have not been near the place!'

'Louisa thought her mamma was not just up to visitors for a day or two,' said Jean. 'You remember she met John, and told him Lady Carnoustie was a thought overdone and in need of rest, and was to be kept quiet; and John, when he told us, made us promise to keep away from them all for a bit; else I am sure I would have been up, for I was so anxious to hear how it all went off!'

'Even Penelope has not been here as often as she used to come.'

'We'll just go up, Marianne. The day has turned out finer than it looked like in the morning — though I misdoubt there's more rain to come by those steady clouds over yonder — so we may as well take the chance while the sky is clear overhead. And no word was said about one day or another. As likely as not John thought we would be going up to-day, and will say at dinner-time, "Hoots! ye might have gone." How provoking that would be, if we had only stayed away to please him!'

Marianne being of the same mind, toilettes were made, and the two sallied forth.

Now it so happened that, had they not been so busy, they might have seen Lady Carnoustie's big barouche emerge from the castle avenue, and turn to the left, then disappear out of sight behind the point of the bay; for Lady Carnoustie had set forth for her accustomed drive rather earlier than usual, having reasons of her own.

Captain Ainslie was to be carried downstairs that afternoon in the carrying chair whereof Dr. McWhinnock had secured the loan, and Lady Carnoustie did not see herself playing second fiddle on the occasion.

She disliked fuss, unless she herself were the centre of the fuss. A *cortége* sweeping in with an airified young man as its head and front, and all the arranging and congratulating which would have to follow, would be contrary to her taste in every respect; and, accordingly, she resolved to evade it by setting

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forth on a long drive, and leaving word that she hoped to find the invalid comfortably ensconced on her return.

As their mother was not to be at home, and as their father was likewise absent, it followed, according to Louisa's and Joanna's notions, that no one of the fair spinsterhood could with propriety await Captain Ainslie's descent.

'Not all of us together?' exclaimed Penelope, almost angrily. She felt not only the absurdity but the unkindness of the decision. 'He *will* feel flat.'

'After the exertion of moving, he will be only too thankful to be spared any stir and noise, dear mamma thinks,' from Louisa.

'He might at least be given the chance. I know how I should feel if I were coming downstairs for the first time, and not a soul to receive me.'

She had, however, to give way. Joanna had been told off to escort her and Mina on a cottage visit, and Louisa was to occupy the seat by her mother in the barouche. By the tone of Lady Carnoustie's voice when commenting on the arrangement Penelope could tell that its original organisation had been her own.

'He will be nice and quiet until we return,' she had summed up.

'I suppose they would think all sorts of things if I were to stay and amuse him,' muttered Penelope to herself. She had been looking forward to Bob's coming downstairs all the morning, and thinking that very likely Redwood would look in also; and, feeling sure it was going to be wet, and that all the party could be gathered in the smaller drawing-room, which was that in ordinary use, had decided on changing her summer cotton for an elegant autumn tweed which had just arrived from town and in which she was dying to see herself. If any remarks were made, she could say it was always well to try on a new frock.

Now the tiresome rain had kept off, and everyone was going out. Under protest she had to go too.

When the walking party returned from their excursion, about two hours thereafter, they beheld what was for it, perhaps, the strangest sight Carnoustie Castle had ever witnessed — Miss Marianne Soutter seated at cards with Captain Robert Ainslie!

Penelope thought she should never forget that sight. They

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entered the room, she and Joanna and Mina, softly, so as not to jar upon the invalid's nerves, and conscious of some slight excitement withal — (Bob having been such a central point throughout the previous fortnight, and even before his accident quite a leading feature of the party) — they entered, we say, gently.

Joanna first, her younger sister next, Penelope a pace or two in the rear. Penelope was the shyest of the three, yet willing to get in and have it over. On the last occasion when she had seen this man, they had parted with jest and banter, gibe and retort — making, in short, that kind of play with each other which either means something or nothing according to the players. She and Alice Ainslie had accompanied the shooting party to the edge of the moor, and twice had Ainslie turned to wave a gay 'Adieu' from the heights, till even Alice had merrily dragged her from the spot, with a jocund significance that half-abashed, half-pleased Penelope. She did not mind who laughed at her about Captain Ainslie. She wished to be laughed at. She was trying to laugh at herself.

Still the recollection induced a consciousness which in its turn bred a vague timidity, and the bright girl who was generally in the front rank of everything let her cousins pass through the doorway before her.

The next moment, however, saw all soft memories thrown to the winds. There sat Miss Marianne in her purple silk, best dress and large, lace collar, her brown face shining with satisfaction and the heat of the room, and with her gloves and parasol laid on a chair beside her. There she sat, close to the settee on which Bob was elegantly stretched, covered with a sofa-shawl; and between the two was drawn up a low table of an exact height to suit the invalid — a table to the eyes of the new-comers all covered with playing cards.

How had this extraordinary departure from established rule been brought about? Feeling a little flat, as Penelope had predicted, and wondering how ever he was to yawn through the weary hours which it appeared he was still destined to pass alone, Bob had caught with delight the sound of an opening door and the sight of the young footman, who it will be remem-

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bered was a new importation alongside of Mr. East's daughter. Duncan had been left alone that afternoon, Hyslop having taken himself off to visit a crony and detail the labours and triumphs of the past fortnight. He had not had a run since first the Ainslies' visit was talked of; and it had taken him all his time up till now to get straight again within his own domain; but having seen his mistress safely out of sight, and the sick soldier conveyed downstairs into a cosy little sitting-room opening out of that in ordinary use by the family when alone, where he could be attended to by Duncan, or Mrs. Alison, or anybody, Hyslop had made off for a little recreation, and as luck would have it, had scarcely gone ere the Misses Soutter rang the front-door bell.

Now Duncan knew that the Misses Soutter were always to be admitted whether anyone were at home or not. So wisely did the Misses Soutter deport themselves, and so artfully did they contrive to be aware when their presence would or would not be welcome, that never in the whole course of their connection with the Carnoustie family had they been turned from the castle door.

It had occasionally happened — very rarely, but still it had happened — that on emerging from the last bend of the avenue the sisters had beheld a vehicle in waiting before the august doorway — a strange equipage, which told of strange folks within.

Without a flicker of hesitation they had simultaneously wheeled round and retraced their steps, informing their brother thereafter that Lady Carnoustie was entertaining company, so they did not go in.

Some might have termed this servile. Dr. McWhinnock's wife, for instance, a dapper little woman, who was in the habit of talking to her Glasgow friends of 'the Carnousties' and all their ways and habits — inferring that she had the run of the house day and night — would have turned up her pert little nose at the bare idea of turning back from any place because she might be *de trop* in any society, and had indeed on one occasion displaced by her gig, (the doctor's gig, borrowed for the occasion,) a ducal waggonette which had found its way over from the other side of the island, and strutted forward, all

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unabashed, into the very midst of a formidable circle, wherein even Lady Carnoustie was not quite herself.

'I have just got my new autumn things, so what have I to mind?' thought she.

Lady Carnoustie, on the other hand, knew very well what ought to have been minded, and was grimly resolved that on no second occasion should that irrepressible, underbred little voice and that little plebeian figure with its restless movements and its resolution to be observed and noticed, have a chance of being commented upon in her drawing-room.

'The impertinence of it!' exclaimed she, over and over again; until even the offender's husband himself saw, 'The impertinence of it' legible on her countenance, when next summoned to the castle.

'You just *did* for yourself — that's what you did,' said he at home subsequently, 'thrusting in your noddle among all the grand lords and ladies, and thinking that that was a time for anyone to take notice of *you!* One would have thought you would have had the sense to turn tail.'

'And what for should I turn tail?' cried she, in a high voice. 'It would have been very absurd when I was all dressed to make the call, and you had let me have the gig, and Lady Carnoustie was at home, for me to have come away from the door because some other people were calling too!'

'It might have been absurd — it would have been common sense.' The doctor put out his lip and drew his brows together.

'Common sense! What nonsense you talk! Men know nothing about society;' but she had not been clever at concealing her discomfiture. Even to her blunt perceptions the quarter of an hour spent within the castle drawing-room had been a bad one, and she had let out as much to her husband.

'You wait and see; it will be worse still,' nodded Job's comforter now. 'I know her ladyship — know her to the backbone. She's as proud a woman as lives, and though she pretends to despise fashion and grandeur, it galls her to the quick if word comes that the duke and duchess are entertaining over yonder, and no invitations have come to her or hers. They wouldn't

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go — but they would like to be asked to go. For all Lord and Lady Carnoustie hate to be in the world, they would fain not be *left out* of it. I don't say Lady Carnoustie cares about everybody — but she does care about the duchess. And the duchess is a sharp, satirical woman, who has said many a cutting thing already of the Carnousties — though, certie! she herself is not much to boast of, with her play-acting, horse-racing, Monte-Carloing — and there's never been any love lost between the families. That's what makes me sorry you bothered our folks. They wanted all the help they could get — not to be hindered. And a princess in the room too!'

'I don't see what harm I did. How was I to know about the princess?'

'Not from being presented to her, I'll go bail.'

'Lady Carnoustie is always as disagreeable as she can be. I don't think she was anyway different from what she usually is.'

'Did she take any notice of you? Did she talk to you at all? Did she ask after the baby? Did she ——'

'I don't think I had anything to complain of.' The young wife tossed her head. 'And why you should want to turn me against the Carnousties, who have been kind friends to you for so many years, I can't imagine. Look how they came and called on me directly I was married. Of course, my first call was due to them after baby was born.'

'There's no use crying over spilt milk,' quoth the doctor, sententiously, 'and I make no doubt you meant it for the best; but it was a mistake, I tell you — a mistake; and you'll find that out for yourself by-and-by, or I'm far wrong. Take a lesson from John Soutter's women: they know the Carnousties inside out, and they would no more have had themselves shown in to Lady Carnoustie's drawing-room on the top of the duke and duchess and all their lords and ladies than they would have asked for accommodation in Mr. Macdougall's pulpit when he was preaching from it! There's times and there's seasons. What's a suitable and proper place at one time, is a very pit of destruction at another. It'll be long before you set foot inside the castle walls again, for all you make a mock of me for saying so!'

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The prophecy had been fulfilled. How it happened Mrs. McWhinnock never could exactly explain, but months and months passed and she never could hit upon the right hour for calling at Carnoustie Castle, and never was asked to luncheon or tea, as she had been on first coming to the neighbourhood. It was tiresome, it was provoking. It prevented her being able to take her friends — and she was great in friends — over the house and grounds, and it gave a sense of unreality to her descriptions of the park and gardens when it came out that she had never seen this or that alteration or innovation with which her husband and others had become quite familiar.

For Dr. McWhinnock continued in favour though his wife went out. As a gruff, honest old bachelor he had become in a manner part and parcel of the Carnoustie life, and though they deplored his marriage after so many years of comfortable celibacy, they had done their duty by the well-endowed tradesman's daughter, who, nothing doubting, considered herself at home with them on the instant.

Afterwards, however, it was almost a relief to discover that it would really be impossible to make anything of the doctor's wife. They had struggled — particularly Louisa and Joanna — to bring to light traits of character which should dispose the heart of their mother towards her. They had overlooked, with their habitual mildness, her pert advances towards intimacy when alone with themselves; but after the tactless exhibition above narrated, they had themselves been forced to own that dear mamma was right as usual, and Mrs. McWhinnock only to be kept in her place by stringent and unrelaxing regulations. Thenceforth, neither Lady Carnoustie nor any of the young ladies were to be found at home when it was the doctor's wife who made the inquiry.

On the other hand, two lumbering old figures which every now and then toiled slowly up the avenue, and failed not to preface the same interrogation with a 'Good afternoon, Hyslop,' were never refused admittance.

'Oh, come in, Miss Soutter, there's some of them at home — leastways, they're about, — and Duncan can run and bring them in.'

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Hyslop would throw open the door wide; 'Come in,' he would repeat, beaming welcome; and if occasionally he had to add, 'Her ladyship's not come home from her drive,' or, 'Her ladyship's keeping her own room this afternoon,' he would see no reason at all why that should embarrass his interlocutors. He had even been known to summon Mrs. Alison, rather than let them go; and the old nurse, despite a chronic jealousy of anyone on whom shone the light of the family smile, would still be benignant towards Mr. Soutter's sisters.

'They are *all* so kind,' the latter would murmur, quite affected by this breadth of cordiality, and attributing it to nothing less than their own modest unpretentiousness.

Now Hyslop being, as we have said, out of the way, and Duncan the footman thrown upon his own resources, it is not to be wondered at that Duncan should, upon recognising the Misses Soutter through the vista which opened before him as he hurried to the outer door, decide at once upon admitting them, even though he had only Captain Ainslie to admit them to.

He would not show the ladies into the empty drawing-room — not he. 'The captain' would be glad of company, and no one else was at home; everyone was glad to see the Misses Soutter; and, in brief, the two maiden ladies were plumped in upon poor Bob before he knew what he was about, or had the faintest conception of whom his visitors might be.

He told the story to Redwood afterwards in his own fashion.

'Give you my word, never was so taken aback in my life! Two elephantine females, seemin' to rise from nowhere, obscured the light, and towered over me like the Tower of Babel! Jove, I was frightened. Hadn't seen anythin' like it out of a menagerie. Would have liked a pot shot at either of them at a hundred yards; but they were too close for comfort in that little room, by Jove! I had got out the cards you brought over, and was havin' a beastly dull little game all by myself — it was better than nothin' — and I suggested that the females should clear out, and take up position in the drawing-room. They were quite agreeable, but I thought they looked rather hard at the cards, so I threw in, "It's not very amusin' playing cribbage by oneself;" and, what do you think, if that old card-

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sharper hadn't off her gloves the next minute, and was down on a chair by my side, and — and — I assure you, Redwood, I was ready to grovel at her feet, beetle-crushers though they were, when I found she could actually play, and, what was more, was game to play.'

'And to think that Marianne's cribbage should not be thrown away at last,' had been Miss Jean's comment, as she silently sat by in placid ignorance. 'I hope Marianne has not been too hasty, but really, as the cards were there, and Lady Carnoustie must have seen them,' (for they were not to know better), 'it seemed only kind to the poor young man. Poor lamb! To think of his playing cards all by himself!'

Then the walkers came in, and before they had recovered from the sight, Lady Carnoustie and Louisa followed; and before Lady Carnoustie could open her lips there were Lord Carnoustie and Mr. Redwood.

'Havin' such a jolly game,' said little Ainslie, looking up at them all. 'Cribbage ain't as good as piquet, perhaps, but Miss Marianne does not know piquet. Do you — ah — happen to play piquet, Lady Carnoustie?'

Lady Carnoustie turned away. Without the necessity for words, all present, the speaker alone excepted, knew that she had turned in anger. She who abhorred games of all kinds, who did not know one card from another but thought all equally wicked-looking and disreputable — who disapproved of Captain Ainslie, and who particularly objected to having her sofa cushions piled one above another, had more to bear at the moment than she could stand.

'Nobody plays piquet?' inquired Bob, innocently. He had only imagined himself unheard.

And the next moment he and all were surprised. 'I do,' cried a shrill, treble voice from the rear, and Penelope pressed to the front.

'I do — or at least I can learn. I should like it of all things. Will you teach me, Captain Ainslie?'

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CHAPTER XLI.

HER DEAR LITTLE SINGING MAN.

PENELOPE had brushed past those standing nearer than herself to Captain Ainslie's couch, and had responded to his query of 'Anyone play piquet?' with an eager and almost defiant enthusiasm.

Penelope, silly child, was vastly pleased with herself for this performance.

For nearly a fortnight she had had no opportunity of showing Mr. Redwood how well she and this gay, light-hearted soldier hit it off, how thoroughly they understood each other, and what fun they had; here was the opportunity.

She did know some games of cards, she could easily pick up others; anyhow she would enrol herself as Captain Ainslie's pupil, and permit Mr. Charles Redwood to make as much or as little of that fact as he chose.

As far as she could see, Redwood and Mina were progressing nicely. To be sure she, as originator of the movement, had to attend closely to its workings, and take a good deal of the active management into her own hands. She had to suggest walking with her cousin along the road which Redwood must needs take on his way home from the moor; she had to call the halt, and do a good deal of the conversation, when of course by chance he met the pair, and next inquire if Mr. Redwood thought of coming over to cheer the sick man in the evening?

That accomplished, when Redwood came, she had to contrive how he should be thrown into her cousin's company in the antecedent moments; how these should be lengthened; how Mina should be somewhere about when Redwood emerged from Captain Ainslie's room; how the lovers should meet on Sundays, and walk side by side away from the church door, — together with many other minor artifices, which she told herself with a little shake of the head were all extremely necessary, only it was

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rather droll that she should have to think of them. If Mina had been like other girls, she would have seen herself far enough before she would have taken such an infinity of trouble to jog on a limping love-affair.

And why it should limp was the puzzle?

There was no obstacle. Not only did Mina in private profess herself sensible of Mr. Redwood's worth and attractions, but she had regained those curious fluctuations of mood, those unaccountable changes of colour, those swift, mysterious turns of high and low spirits which had once perplexed and disturbed Penelope.

Penelope thought she understood them now. Obviously her cousin would always be odd and capricious when her heart was engaged. It was now engaged with Redwood: so much the better.

As for Redwood, he was a slow man, a distractingly slow man. Probably he had not the wit to perceive that, in spite of the Carnoustie formality and reticence, he would be more than welcome in the light of a suitor, and was content to bide his time, and weave at leisure a decorous, wearisome courtship.

'Oh, the blindness of some people!' stormed the mercurial Penelope. 'What on earth is the man waiting for? He will wear us all out. Here we are well into September and nothing done! We meet every day — or almost every day; I hound them on; they can do nothing for themselves; I have all the work to do; no one else stirs hand or foot; they sit there like so many woolly-faced sheep, leaving it all to me to dodge and circumvent and arrange; then at night Mina comes to my room full of smiles and gratitude, and saying I am "so good to her," and that she is "so happy!" I have saved this poor girl from a horrid fate, look at it in any way you please: either she would have gone off with this Torquil Macalister, or there would have been a future to face which —— upon my word, I would sooner have been the shepherd's wife. But I don't somehow feel satisfied, I don't feel pleased with myself; I don't like to see Mina come in smiling and blushing. It seems too soon; and she too heartless. Only a month ago — not a month — she

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was meeting Torquil in the glen; he was all in all; she was quite absorbed in that detestable love affair — and now! now she has the same sort of feeling for Redwood!'

Then Penelope's ruminations would take a new turn.

'And where should I be if she had not the same feeling for Redwood? In a nice mess. Redwood, I know, is thinking of her; it is of no use my — and anyway I don't want him; no, I don't; I don't want anyone who does not care for me; I never did, never *did* want Redwood. I only liked him — a little. And that was when I thought he liked me — a little. Now, all I desire is that he should become engaged to my cousin quickly, and that the whole matter should be settled, and everyone understand the other.

'It is such a comfort to me to have you to confide in, Penelope.'

One day soon after this Mina came brightly in, and found Penelope alone in the room.

'No one else ever asks me a question, or seems to think anything is going on, — but you know all about it, dear. Indeed I can never forget that it was you who first gave me the hint that — that Mr. Redwood — *you* know,' tenderly putting her hand upon Penelope's arm as she spoke.

'Has he proposed to you?' The demand sounded abrupt, and Penelope moved as though to escape the proffered caress.

'Not exactly. He may, however, any day, don't you think? He is all that is — kind. We had quite a long walk together this afternoon; I came in to tell you about it. We met at the poacher's cottage, on the lower moor, where I had been visiting poor Nanny — she is not to blame, you know, though her husband does poach — and Mr. Redwood was passing as I chanced to come out.'

'Oh, indeed!' The rallying tone was rather forced, but the narrator, unheeding, proceeded with animation.

'He asked if I were alone, and as I was, said he would escort me home. I think, Penelope, he was pleased to find me alone.'

'But what were you doing there alone? You and Joanna were going out together. Ailsie asked me about you, and I

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said you were gone out with Joanna. You know, Mina, you promised ——'

'What does it matter, Penelope? *He* is not on the island, you know. He left directly you told him. And it was on his account that I had to promise.'

'Never mind. Get on. It is all right, I suppose; but why should you say you were going out with Joanna when you could so easily have told me the truth?'

'I have got into a way of being afraid,' said Mina, looking down.

'You need not be afraid with me. You thought you might fall in with Mr. Redwood, I suppose?'

'Yes, yes.' The speaker's breath came and went.

'Well,' drily, 'you know I should not object to that; what then?'

'Oh, nothing, dear Penelope. It was a silly qualm. I did not want anybody to know I was anxious to be alone; and Joanna too might have wondered had I asked her to leave me.'

'She was not with you at all, then?' in some surprise.

'N — no. We went round the garden together, and Joanna said it was cold, and went in. Then I went on to the moor by myself.'

'You appear to find the moor a convenient place.' Penelope longed to say something cutting, taunting, sarcastic, she knew not what.

Why could not Mina be content to take Redwood as provided by her cousin? She, Penelope, had engaged to purvey this lover, and felt herself responsible for him. She could not have such unmethodical, unrecognised deviations from the path she had laid down.

Mina taking upon herself to conduct a meeting whereof Penelope was only told when it had been successfully carried out, forsooth!

Penelope's blood boiled within her. She felt as if her authority had been set at nought, and her intervention were no longer needed.

'I must say you get on fast,' she observed, bitterly. 'You

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don't let the grass grow under your feet. Now, Mina,' with continued asperity, 'you must just please to understand this — there is to be no under-handedness in *this* affair. When a man like Mr. Redwood is in the question there can be no need for deceiving and blindfolding. I don't like what you did to-day, and I won't have it.'

A faint gleam stole into the other's eyes. It might have meant anything or nothing. Penelope not looking her way did not perceive it.

'I say I won't have it,' she repeated, in masterful accents. 'You might be content with what I am doing for you — I am doing all I can — and not begin with your old tricks that have got you into trouble enough already. Do, for Heaven's sake, be honest now if you never were in your life before!' and she threw herself into a fresh attitude with a gesture of impatience.

'I really cannot see what I have done to deserve this,' replied her cousin, goaded to sullenness, for which indeed there was some excuse in the tone of the other. 'Penelope, you do say such things. And you might remember that I have *some* feelings.'

'Feelings! Fiddlesticks!' But Penelope caught herself up with a snort of disdain. 'Well, well; I daresay you have, as you say, "*some* feelings,"' she sneered. 'But, feelings or not, let us understand each other. You know that Mr. Redwood was *my idea*. You had got into a scrape, and I wanted to help you out of it. Accordingly I invented Mr. Redwood.'

'Invented?'

'You know what I mean,' imperiously. 'I found him out; put him into your head, told you all about him, and how well it would do, and — and everything. You would never have thought of it for yourself. I am sure the trouble it has been to me!' and she sighed.

'Trouble?' Mina looked at her cousin curiously.

'It has lain like a great weight upon my mind; a person can't engage in an undertaking of this kind without thinking, and thinking, and worrying over it. I am sure it has never been out of my thoughts night or day of late. And I am getting quite fretted because it won't come off, and am at my

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wits' end altogether. You might be grateful, and not vex me' — actually there were tears behind the reproachful tone.

Mina, who had been hanging her head listening, lifted her eyelids, and marked the tears. A strange expression came into her face. She hesitated before speaking. At last, 'I know I am in your power, Penelope,' she said quietly.

'In my power!' exclaimed Penelope, surprised. 'That is a — an odd way of putting it.'

'If I had not been,' continued her cousin in the same subdued accents, 'what would be the meaning of all this? You are determined that there is to be no mistaking our positions. I am to recollect that unless I obey you, blindly, implicitly, you will crush me, as of course you can easily do; you have got your foot on my neck, and I am to know it once for all.'

'Good Heavens! what a creature you would make me!' exclaimed Penelope, confounded, for there was no denying the truth of the picture. 'I — you' — she knew not how to vindicate herself.

'Oh, I know what you would say' — Mina pursued her advantage — 'that I have put the position coarsely, and that I ought to be far too meek and humble, and under far too deep an obligation to you, not to follow your lead without any words about it; but, Penelope, don't you think you go sometimes a little too far?'

A startled interrogation was apparent on Penelope's lip.

'You are bent on doing everything for me,' proceeded Mina, slowly; 'it is very kind; I don't mean to complain; but it does strike me sometimes as a little peculiar that you should be so very, very indignant if I ever attempt to do anything for myself. It is a little as if you felt you had bought me body and soul, and meant to keep me your slave for ever, because of one unfortunate circumstance.'

Now this was precisely what Penelope did feel, and, in spite of herself, her looks betrayed the shaft had told. She was more discomfited than she could have believed possible.

At once her cousin adopted another tone. 'Now that you are aware of it, you will try not to be quite so autocratic, will you not, dear Penelope? You see I was obliged to let you

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have one little glimpse of yourself as others see you; and though I own you are the cleverest of matchmakers, I think for your own sake, dear, you should not ride your hobby-horse to death. There, let us kiss, and be friends. Mr. Redwood and I are getting on nicely; and pray believe we can do without assistance now, and no need for inquiries and bother if I do run across him out-of-doors; it is so much pleasanter anywhere than in our great formal drawing-room, — so make your mind easy. What, still frowning? Oh no, there is nothing to frown about now; go and play piquet with Captain Ainslie, who is wondering what has kept you away from him all this time;' and suddenly all smiles and arch good-humour, Mina Carnoustie insisted upon the kiss and closed the conversation, taking care it should not be started afresh, by quitting the room the next minute.

Outside the door, however, her face changed to one of mocking satisfaction. 'I don't think she will interfere with me again,' she muttered.

Piquet was not to be thought of, but Penelope, as soon as she could collect her thoughts, decided not to give them any more work to do for the present, but to hurry with her toilette and go down to the ante-room, where Bob was singing to his banjo in the twilight.

The light now lasted until the dinner lamps were lit; and at no time of the day did the flute-like notes of Captain Ainslie's voice fall more soothingly on the ear than at this mystic hour. One and another had learned to wander in, and sit down without disturbing the singer. Lord Carnoustie, when he had shuffled himself into his evening suit, would come poking round the curtains on his tiptoes, and subside into the handiest arm-chair, pluming himself upon being no disturber of the peace. His daughters would steal forth from the gathering shadow presently, with the same furtive and would-be noiseless movements; Lady Carnoustie would consider she had effaced her august entrance as it never had been effaced before; and at last, for she was generally late, Penelope would step alertly in with an 'I-care-for-nobody-no-not-I' air, and a perfectly firm, unabashed tread; whereupon every member of the party already

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assembled would turn his or her head irritably, and cry 'Hush' in unison.

This amused Penelope, who had no notion of being 'hushed' for trumpery little Bob Ainslie, however angelic his dear little voice!

The voice was at her disposal, she could have it whenever she wanted; and in point of fact, Bob had almost got to dislike his own favourite songs because Penelope would turn him on like a musical box whenever she fancied, more especially whenever he would sooner have been doing something else.

He would have liked to inaugurate a tenderer era with the heiress. Banjo-singing and piquet-playing were well enough as auxiliaries in the game; but Penelope, who had been so easy to flirt with at the beginning of their acquaintance, and who had gone on so promisingly up to the day of his accident, was become difficult of management.

She would, and she wouldn't. She would bring him in posies from the garden, arrange them on his table, be careful that he could reach them to inhale their fragrance, and then calmly carry off the remainder in her hand, saying she had promised a supply to the Misses Soutter; nay, she had been known to disentangle the heliotrope from Captain Ainslie's vase, though she knew he was fond of it, and though her own hand had placed it there, on the plea that the old ladies had none in their garden, and that it was too late to go back to the heliotrope bed for more.

Bob had begged for a little tiny spray. 'Not to-night, but I'll see you get some to-morrow,' said Penelope, coolly. 'It would be a pity to spoil this.'

And when the morrow arrived, certainly there was the heliotrope, but it was old Lord Carnoustie who came tramping in with it, and who snuffed as much of the scent as he could up his huge nostrils before handing it over.

It was the same with the music. Penelope would listen for ever. Calmly arranged in an easy chair a few yards off, she would dictate the programme with as little mercy or consideration as though the hapless Ainslie were a nigger minstrel below her balcony performing for pence; but if he strove to throw

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anything of a wistful significance into his ditty, she yawned: she 'did not care for that one,' — 'it was not nearly so pretty as the one before;' and the singer was quick enough to suspect he had missed his point.

He was fain to be content with Penelope's usurping airs in public. In public, as we have seen, she patronised Bob with an air of would-be innocence which was highly edifying. He was *her* man; her devoted adherent; her clever, obliging, singing man; she was pleased to show him off, and let the audience see how he answered to the whip; she in a manner accepted and claimed his dutiful subservience.

One day the singing man fancied his mistress almost arrogant. Redwood was present.

CHAPTER XLII.

'HE KICKED THE FRENCH NOVEL OFF THE SOFA.'

It may be wondered at that Lady Carnoustie put up with the card-playing. She would not if she could have helped it, but her husband had been prepared for her, and 'to be fore-warned is to be fore-armed.'

When Captain Ainslie called after his host one day to beg for a pack of cards wherewith to beguile the hours of his enforced seclusion, Lord Carnoustie felt himself blush as he owned he 'doubted' there were none in the house; and he had added hastily that he would send out for a pack at once.

The sending out meant that he would give Mr. Soutter private orders on the subject — orders which would be promptly obeyed, and no remark made. When informed a few hours later that Redwood had forestalled the factor, and found the two young men absorbed in piquet, he sat down and looked on with unfeigned interest. In his youth he had played piquet. He had forgotten the game, and cared not to battle the point with his wife, who would insist on his forgetting he had ever known it; but when the chirpy little invalid all unconsciously brought

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down his cards on his re-admittance to the outer world, and when Lady Carnoustie would fain have prohibited them from defiling her apartments, and for the first time in her life have withered the hapless Misses Soutter for their participation in the misdemeanour, she was met by cool intrepidity on the part of her husband.

'My mother never objected to cards so long as there was no money going,' said he, using his new weapon to advantage. 'If *my mother* did not object, I can't see that *you* have any call to set yourself up. She didn't play, you say? Well, I believe she did not play, and for a very good reason. In her day no one played except for money; it was gambling, or nothing. But I have heard her say, many and many's the time, that there was no harm in *the game*, and if people would only play for *the game*, they might play every night of their lives for any ill done.'

'I do not know enough about the matter to judge,' said Lady Carnoustie stiffly.

'Ay, that's it; you don't know, and yet you set up to judge! Are you willing to take my word for it? I do know; for I have played night after night ——'

'I beg, Carnoustie, you will be careful. What if the children should hear you?'

'Children!' Lord Carnoustie grinned. But he had his point to make. 'Look ye here, my lady, say nothing about it; take it as a matter of course that every young man plays cards.'

'But there is Penelope. Did you hear Penelope?'

'I heard Penelope, what then? She does play; and she had the spirit to own it. You can't shave and shape her as you have done your own daughters, till not one of them can say "Boo" to a goose. Take it like this, if you are a wise woman — set your face against gambling, if you please; you're in the right there, and I'll back you up,' (he did not add that he had winked at the sight of sundry coins on the table between Redwood and Ainslie in the bedroom). 'I have no opinion of gambling; it's bad, and it leads to worse; especially with people that don't know when to stop. But take it as a natural thing that a game of cribbage, or piquet, or that new thing — what

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do they call it? bézique? — is all right. Bless me! you would not have that young fellow going away and saying Carnoustie Castle was a lunatic asylum. I daresay he thinks us queer enough, and behind the times enough, as it is. But at least we can be civil to him; and as for him, he means to be uncommonly well-behaved ——'

'Oh, I don't say he is not that!'

'You saw he asked you yourself to play with him. He had no idea of outraging your feelings.'

'No, certainly he had not; and — and perhaps you are right, Carnoustie. You know more about the world than I do.'

Carnoustie held up his head with a knowing air.

'But I must say I was surprised at the Misses Soutter,' said Lady Carnoustie, as though thankful to find somebody she might be surprised at. 'I had no idea they would even know a card by sight ——'

'Let alone grabbing a "fifteen two" from poor Ainslie who had overlooked it in his own hand! Snack as anything! I doubt Miss Marianne is a deceiving hussy,' said Lord Carnoustie with mock seriousness. Then in his natural tone, 'Poor old creature, how happy she looked, perked up there in state, and thinking no harm any more than the babe unborn! She was not to know you had never set eyes on the cards; she thought, of course, Ainslie was under your thumb like the rest of us. It was an awful blow to them both when you went off in a huff.'

'I did not mean to be unkind, Carnoustie.'

'No, no; I daresay not. Poor souls, who could be unkind to them? But you showed what you thought, and that was enough.'

'As soon as they explained and apologised, I forgave them entirely.'

'But you took all the spirit out of them. Oh, don't tell me, for I saw them to the door, and they went with their tails between their legs, I can tell you. I daresay they have been miserable ever since.'

He was leading up to an end he had in view, and Lady Carnoustie's saying nothing, and looking uneasy and dubious, gave him hopes of obtaining it.

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'Cribbage is the most harmless of card games,' he observed musingly.

'Is it? Is it *really*, Carnoustie? You know, Carnoustie, I could never wish to hurt the feelings of the Misses Soutter, such excellent, faithful friends, and their brother so invaluable; and if it would do any good——' she paused.

'Oh, you might put it to rights, I doubt not. Of course I could look in — but it would come best from yourself — it would be more of a compliment — it would be a very great compliment.' She brightened up. 'You might just say you had been at the pains to make inquiries——'

'Yes, I could say that.'

'And that you had it on my authority that cribbage is not a gambling game——'

'You are absolutely sure it is not, Carnoustie?'

'Not as Captain Ainslie and Miss Marianne Soutter play it,' quoth Carnoustie, stoutly. 'It may be — ahem! — as all games are, and for that matter, as everything can be, turned to ill account in ill hands. What's that to us? We can't help that. You drive round that way after luncheon, and send up Miss Marianne, and tell her sister to follow and fetch her later on — and I shan't need to go and drink tea at Glenmore this time,' he subjoined under his breath. And wonderful to relate, he was meekly obeyed, and the *amende honorable* duly made on the lines he had laid down.

When Bob wrote to his mother, she could not make out much from his letter, except that he had got the rummiest old girl in the world to play cribbage with. The state of his health and the improvement in his knee-joint were alike left to be inferred from the statement that he was 'all right.' The probable duration of his stay at Carnoustie Castle was merely to be fathomed from reference to the doctor's verdict that it would be a long business.

About Penelope East he said nothing at all.

But he assured his mother that not only had he got the rummiest old girl in the country to play cribbage with, but that she played uncommonly well.

The weather was fine for September, and it would not have

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suited Lady Carnoustie's ideas for any one to remain within doors in the afternoon in order to amuse the invalid — supposing anyone had wished to do so — but once she had so far got the better of herself as to bring her baronial equipage to a stand before the factor's gate, and make her little speech to the flattered and overpowered sisters, who had run out in the wind and dropping rain before they could be summoned by the footman — and once she had seen their poor old faces irradiated, and felt the grateful clasp of their kind, strong hands, she grew to expect the sight of the broad purple-silk back within the window of the ante-chamber on her daily return from her drive, with a warm glow of benevolent satisfaction; and, but that it might have made Carnoustie quite above himself, would have owned herself indebted to him.

Moreover, she was pleased with Bob for being pleased. The way Bob would hail in his fair antagonist, the bustle he made about her, his care that she should be seated comfortably, as the two settled down and got to work, almost before the room could be cleared for them, and his bawling 'Two for his heels — two for his heels!' when Miss Marianne, excited too much to be steady in her attention while people were on the move around, forgot to note she had turned up a knave, were all so much in his favour.

To be sure he was a poor trifler but the poor trifler had his good points. As a matter of fact, no woman, not even a Lady Carnoustie, could resist the winsomeness of Bob's nature. The very fact that it had no backbone made it wonderfully supple and adroit in pleasing.

He held long conversations with Hyslop, called Duncan a good fellow, and joked with Ailsie when she brought him his beef-tea. He had no reserves from anyone. They all knew he was 'a poor devil without a sixpence.' He told Mr. Soutter seriously that he had difficulty in keeping body and soul together. He assured Dr. McWhinnock that it would be charity to order him to stop where he was, as he had nowhere else to go; while to Redwood he confided his hopes and fears about Penelope with an artlessness that made Redwood wince.

'I'm awfully gone on her — I really am. And just think what

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it would be if it came to anythin'. Of course I should have proposed long ago if she had had no money, because then I should have known where I was. We should have had a nice little time, and split as soon as I got my dismiss from here. But I hear she's a hundred-thousander. Soutter says so; swears her father must be makin' his ten to fifteen thousand a year, and has been for a good while past. He must have saved a hundred thousand by this time. And there is no reason why he shouldn't go on makin' it. Soutter says he's a man in his prime; not much over fifty, and good for another score of years. Soutter thinks he could afford to come down handsomely; anyway to set me on my legs, and allow us a decent income. It — it solemnises a fellow. I don't feel as if I could go headlong into it, you know.'

Redwood nodded.

'There's my mother,' proceeded Bob, thoughtfully smoking. 'She is expectin' every day to hear it has come off. She was at me before she left not to lose the opportunity. You should have heard her! Women think a thing like this is to be gone into slap-dash; hey presto! the thing's done. I let her talk; it amused her and did no one any harm. She's a good soul, but impetuous. She's had such infernally hard luck that she has no spirit left for the — the amenities of life. Spoonin' is nowhere with her, it must be all solid bread and cheese. If Penelope had been nobody, and had nothin', she would not even have allowed she was pretty; and precious little sympathy I should have had, I can tell you. She never took the slightest notice of any of my other girls.'

'You see,' said Redwood with an effort, 'this is serious.'

'Serious, by Jove! that's what it is, uncommonly serious. I hardly know what to make of it sometimes. And then, between ourselves, Redwood, Penelope does not meet me half-way. Oh, she's a very nice girl. I think I could be very fond of her. Generally about this time,' reflectively, 'I begin to want a change. If I had had anyone of those others all to myself for a month and more, I should have felt a variety would be welcome, — oh yes, I certainly should; but I don't — no, I really don't feel I am tired of Penelope. Now, what do you think about it all?'

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The person from whom Bob obtained most response was the factor. John Soutter's business heart was fairly enlisted. Here was a fine old family going to the dogs for lack of funds, and here was a charming girl possessed of funds in plenty, on the look-out (presumably) for the fine old family! What coalition was more to be desired by well-wishers of both parties, than that Sir Robert Ainslie's eldest son should be wedded to Mr. Henry East's only daughter?

He wrote up to a friend in London — a friend as shrewd as himself; and in return received information regarding Mr. East's property and business which was perfectly satisfactory, and which was passed on to Bob forthwith.

'Deed, captain, you're in luck. She's a bonny bit thing, and good for her hunder thousand, to put the figure at its lowest. East is doubling his income by this present journey, and no one knows how much he has put past already. He inherited a considerable sum with the business to start with. He has never had any other children, and I should say there is no doubt Miss Penelope will get it all. Except of course, he might chance to marry again,' with an after-thought.

'The deuce he might!' Bob rubbed his chin; 'I should not wish to be sordid, you know, Mr. Soutter, but what — say the old gentleman did marry again — what the devil should we do in that case?'

'You would have your marriage settlement, captain.'

'My marriage settlement? Small good that would do me! Who's going to put anythin' into *my* marriage settlement, unless it's my bills? If all we should have to depend upon would be my marriage settlement ——'

'Hoots! captain, you misunderstand. You would settle what you could, of course, — ahem! — what you could. Sir Robert would do his utmost; but it would be from the lady's side that the muscle and sinew of the marriage settlement would have to come. Mr. East would no doubt be ready with a good lump sum which could not be touched in any case, and as his second marriage is not to be regarded as a likely thing ——'

'Oh, I don't know! Old codgers are disgustin'ly matrimonial.'

'At any rate, I doubt if you will ever have a fairer chance,'

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said the lawyer, rising. 'Queer as it may seem, if a lassie has siller at her back, she is safe to have a squint of the eye, or a hare-lip, or at the least, a red nose; whiles she'll have a crookit back, or a twisted leg. But an heiress that has the bonniest face and the lightsomest step in all the country-side — see to her now,' for Penelope was running among the flower-beds below; 'is na yon a prize worth the winning?' and from beneath his grey shock of hair the old man's eyes gleamed as he spoke.

By-and-by he quietly took his leave.

After he had gone the invalid lay quite still for some minutes. Then he turned over, raised himself up, and leaning on his elbow, followed with his gaze the direction the other had taken.

Penelope was still there, busy among the late sweet peas. Her hat had been blown back upon her shoulders, and her brown curls were tossing over her brow.

She was laughing and shouting to some one unseen, and the gay sounds came up to the mullioned window of the tower.

Then suddenly Penelope caught sight of the watcher's face, and shook the flowers she held at him with a merry note of recognition and greeting.

He waved his hand back, and let it fall by his side.

Standing there in the mild September sunshine, so young and fair, such a girl, such a bright beginner in life, with ne'er a cloud nor haunting remembrance to mar her spotless past, there came over the worthless man of the world such a sudden sickening vision of his own paltry self, of his contemptible existence, with its follies, its shams, its trickeries and falsehoods, of its perverse corners and faintly outlined skeletons, that for one brief moment of his butterfly career the veil was lifted from his eyes, and he perceived the manner of man he was. He kicked the French novel off the sofa.

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CHAPTER XLIII.

TOSH LOSES A LETTER.

THE invalid stranger at Carnoustie Castle was an object of much interest to the country-side, and to no one more than its 'daft man.'

Tosh could not make the matter out at all.

It was incomprehensible to him that anyone should be sick or sorry who had enough to eat and drink; and how a gentleman who had grand shining boots in which to walk about the moors, should catch a loose stone and fall over it, was a mystery altogether beyond the reach of his understanding.

'He'll be fine and warm up thonder!' he would mutter, glancing up at the castle windows enviously; for however mild the weather might be, it was only when the sun shone in his strength, or when Tosh was permitted to toast himself by Mrs. Alison's fire, that the poor idiot had anything of a comfortable glow in his veins. 'Fegs! but it's a fine thing to be ill at Carnoustie Castle!'

'Carnoustie,' he demanded, suddenly, one day, 'are ye no gaun to bid me ben the hooss to see him, Carnoustie? It wad be neeborly — me that sees but few sick fowk. 'Deed, I was thinkin' ye wad hae budden me gang hen to see the captain afore noo.'

'Aweel, Tosh,' Lord Carnoustie's eyes twinkled, but he hesitated. Then he turned to Penelope, who was by his side. 'What do you think? Shall I take him in? Would Bob appreciate him?'

'I don't quite know,' replied Penelope, whose perceptions were acute, and who had remarked that Captain Ainslie was more likely to be sensitive on certain points than his host. 'Suppose you tell him to come over to-morrow, Sunday, and to make himself very *nice*, and *clean*, and all that first,' she whispered. 'Sunday is his clean day, isn't it? And look here,

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uncle, to soften his disappointment, I'll take him in to Ailsie's room now, if you like, and get her to give him something.'

'Aye, that'll do. It would be a shame to refuse the poor fellow; but certainly he is at his worst to-day; he always runs down towards the end of the week; but mind, Penelope, he gets something; and tell Ailsie he is to be let in to-morrow when he calls; and I'm to be told ——'

'What's a' this bletherin' aboot?' burst in Tosh, looking sternly at his patron; 'there's nae need for sae muckle talk. I'm sayin' a'body's been in to see the captain but me, and it's no freenly to keep me oot, for a' I'm daft. There's plenty as daft as me.'

('He's right there. Troth, there would be a couple of them.' Lord Carnoustie jogged Penelope's arm and sniggered delightedly.)

'Ye're no that wise-like yersel,' concluded Tosh, taking umbrage, as he was apt to do, at mirth which he had not intended to provoke.

'Ye're no that polite to say sae, Tosh. Do I ever threep at you that you're no wise-like? 'Deed, ye're the maist wise-like lad in the place when ye tak' the fancy. Ye're a deal mair wise-like than — oh! — ah! — yes,' in his natural accent, responding to Penelope's warning pressure. 'Yes, it would hardly do if he came out with the sentiment to our friend upstairs. But we must let him have his way, if it were but for the fun of it. Hey, Tosh, my man, speak to me noo,' reverting to Tosh's dialect and idioms. 'See the captain ye shall, ——'

Tosh's threatening brow relaxed.

'He'll be fain to see ye, Tosh, ——'

Tosh beamed all over.

'But hark ye, Tosh, Saturday — the day's Saturday — noo, Saturday's no jist the best day i' the week for payin' veesits,' observed Lord Carnoustie with a soothing colloquial air. 'The Sabbath's a better day, Tosh. Folks, like you an' me are i' their braws; they canna be fashed to put on their braws ilka day; but on the Sabbath they aye do, mind ye that,' with emphasis, 'and when they hae been to the kirk they can luik in at the castle i' the byegaun — aboot dinner-time, eh, Tosh? We'll say neist

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Sabbath Day, Tosh, that's the morn — the captain will be a' prepared for ye the morn, — and to-day — the noo,' he added, hastily, 'Miss Penelope,' unloosing her hand from his arm as he spoke, 'will tak' ye in, and Mrs. Alison will gie ye a bit sup.'

Tosh resigned himself. 'Aweel, may be that'll do,' said he, with a sigh. 'But I had gotten a wee compliment for him here,' putting his hand up to his broad Tam o' Shanter bonnet, 'aweel, it's nae matter. I'll bring it the morn,' ruminating.

'What's that he is saying?' inquired Lord Carnoustie, not catching the drift of the remarks.

'I'm sayin' it's nae matter,' repeated Tosh, loudly. Then with a severe glance, 'What else suld I be sayin'? Am I no to hae wee words wi' mysel' as weel as ithers? I hae my secrets too,' with obvious reference to the colloquy which had roused his suspicion before. 'But I'll gang in — I'll gang in,' he added, recovering; 'gif she'll come wi' me,' pointing to the young lady whose name he never ventured upon, 'and she's to say I'm to hae a braw sup, is she no, Carnoustie? Aweel, ye're a guid man, Carnoustie; an' sae I aye tell them whae threep ye're thrawn and dour, — but ye micht hae let me see the captain, ——'

'Hurry him in, or we shall have it all over again;' and Lord Carnoustie acknowledged with a courteous gesture the idiot's parting salute, always performed in the most elaborate and punctilious manner — and turned to while away the remainder of the afternoon among his farm-steadings.

It struck Penelope that Ailsie looked ill and worried. Ailsie had been in the most benignant of humours during the past weeks. Nothing was wrong with her; nobody was out of favour; and if there were the faintest indications of a change of atmosphere on her brow, Penelope knew only too well the magic touch which never failed to restore it to placidity. She had but to hint at Redwood's suit, but to remark that he was never away from the place, and to surmise smilingly that something besides shooting must be keeping him on at Inverashet, now that the birds were wild and his bags scanty, to see Ailsie's sternest lip relax.

'Gae wa' wi' ye noo!' the old woman would retort, laughing

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all over, and looking over her shoulder as though to be sure no one else heard. 'Has he said anything to the captain, think ye?' one day she demanded, suddenly.

'Couldn't say indeed. I haven't listened at the keyhole lately;' but though Penelope affected to jest, there was an ugly meaning in the words. Indeed she had never forgiven Mina that treacherous act; and now and again would catch herself wondering whether it had been a solitary one of its kind or not? She now proceeded gaily. 'Still, to judge by outward appearance, which is pretty much all I have to go upon, I should not judge Captain Ainslie to be the person one would choose for a confidence, nor should I judge Mr. Redwood the man to make it. Mr. Redwood is the true type of an Englishman, "Close buttoned to the chin, broadcloth without," and a — ah! that's what we can't be sure of, Ailsie; has he or has he not "a warm heart within?" Eh, Ailsie? What d'ye think?'

'I kenna what ye're talkin' aboot,' quoth Ailsie, stolidly.

'Why, about Mr. Redwood's heart. I was quoting poetry to you, though you did not know it. The poetry is about a man who was

Close buttoned to the chin,
Broadcloth without and a warm heart within.

The point is, whether Mr. Charles Redwood, who is certainly "close buttoned to the chin" — (and who looked remarkably well, buttoned up to his ears in his white mackintosh this afternoon) — has the other requisite of a true man. For his own sake, Ailsie' — the speaker paused, and her tone changed to one of serious significance, — 'for his own sake, I am inclined to hope — not.'

Ailsie was busy washing some fine old lace in a bowl. She did not reply.

'A woman's heart is rather a troublesome possession, Ailsie.'

'Whiles it is,' said Ailsie, drily.

'You know what I mean,' rejoined Penelope, scrutinising the old woman's features; 'of course you can answer me or not as you please; of course Mina is far more to you than I am, or ever could be; and you may not like to have me put my

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secret thoughts into words; but yet, Ailsie, I should be so glad if you could chase it away, if you could laugh at me for it, be angry with me for it, say that I do Mina an injustice and an injury — it *is* a shame that I who have known her so lately should be so severe upon her,' — she broke off suddenly.

'Aweel, ye'd best say it oot noo,' responded the nurse in the same matter-of-fact tone. 'Syne it's there, it's best oot. What ails ye at her? What's wrang wi' her?'

'She is so strange — so unreal. She never seems to me as if she dared to be her real self even with *me;* and sometimes when she has been quite nice and natural for a little while, and I begin to think it must be more in my fancy than anything else that she is — is always acting a part, she will quite suddenly and without the slightest provocation break out into that bitter unfeeling tone she used the first day I was here, when she gave me such a tirade! Well, I think I understand up to a certain point. She has been ill-treated and resents it; she has a small spiteful mind which dwells and dwells upon its injuries; but, Ailsie, what I can't understand is about — about Mr. Redwood. I may speak to you, Ailsie, because you are one of ourselves, ——'

'Oo, aye, ye can speak to me.'

'She thinks he cares for her, and she has as good as told me she is willing to — you know; and she certainly goes on just as she did when — I mean just as a girl would do who has a lover; but now listen, for within lies the puzzle — all this is *behind his back.* It is *to me* she looks conscious, and blushes, and is breathless and flurried, and — altogether. To him, and before him, she is as cold as a stone, or rather she is as phlegmatic as a lump of putty. She takes whatever shape I choose to pinch her into. I give her a little push and say in her ear "Go over there," (to where he is, you know,) and she goes as if I had shot her! I poke her down into a chair next an empty one at luncheon, and she sort of falls into it, and gapes at me helplessly across the table, with a "What-on-earth-do-you-expect-of-me-next?" look. It is enough to make one laugh and cry together. But, mark you, he for his part does not seem to resent anything; he is as polite as possible; yet it

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must often be hard work toiling as he does to make conversation. Now Mr. Redwood is not a man with whom conversation ought to be hard work. He is quiet; but — oh, I could make him talk — I could make him laugh. He was never bored, never absent-minded with me, —— '

'Deed then, what for did e'er he leave you?' interposed Ailsie, bluntly.

'Leave me? He never left me. There was nothing to "leave," ' but Penelope gave a little sigh, and the colour in her cheek mounted and faded again. 'I only spoke as I did, because I wish to discover if I can what it is in Mina that makes her so cold, so impassive towards Mr. Redwood? Can she, do you think, love *anyone?*' The last sentence was uttered imperatively, sharply.

Ailsie folded the bands of lace, and carefully refolded them.

'Miss Penelope' — she paused, drew up her lips, and straightened the edges of the lace. Her fingers were nervously accurate in every movement. 'Miss Penelope, gif there had been anither hame, an' anither mither, there wad hae been anither bairn. Can she loe ony man, say ye? She can. Will she? I kenna.' Her voice fell, she whispered again beneath her breath, 'I kenna.'

This had happened a few days before Penelope took in Tosh to be fed and consoled.

'I am sorry to trouble you, Ailsie dear,' she said, after a glance at the old woman's face. 'I'm afraid it's not a very good time for you to be worried by Tosh, but uncle Carnoustie told me to bring him in, and particularly wished him attended to. Do you mind?' Now when Penelope added that little quavering 'Do you mind?' to any appeal of the kind, few people felt they did mind, and Ailsie for one would always answer placably.

'Tosh, is it?' she said, looking across to where Tosh stood at the open door, 'aweel, Tosh, ye mun come in; though it's no yer day for comin' to the castle, and ye ken that fine. Tak' aff yer bannet, and sit ye doon. I'll see to him,' to Penelope, who however still lingered. Something in the old nurse's face and still more in her chastened accents aroused her attention.

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'Aren't you well, dear?' she said, tenderly. 'What is the matter? Is it one of your attacks coming on?' Ailsie was subject to 'attacks'; her heart was weak. 'Is there anything I can get for you?'

The nurse hesitated. 'I'm no that weel — but I'm no that ill neither,' she made answer with a half smile, half sigh. 'We a' bit to hae oor aff an' on days, ye ken. Na, na, Penelope; tak' nae heed, my bairn. I'm weel eneugh, and I'll see to Tosh. Toshy, dearie, sit ye doon ——'

Tosh, wondering and somewhat awestruck, obeyed.

'Yer bannet, my man, afore the young leddy,' Ailsie mildly reminded him.

Mechanically Tosh removed his Tam o' Shanter. A shower of hazel nuts in clusters fell upon the floor.

The sight recalled the idiot to himself. 'Losh me! what for did ye mak' me do that?' he demanded indignantly, holding fast the empty 'Tammy' by its worsted knob. 'I kenned there was gaid reason why I wadna tak' it frae my heid, but I had no mind what. Gif ye had let me alane,' — and he regarded the strewn nuts gloomily.

Penelope was already on her knees gathering them together. She did not, if the truth were known, care over much for the task, — for Tosh's fiery faggot of hair, untouched in all probability from one year to another, had been in contact with the green clusters, — but Ailsie looked so depressed and sad, seemed so much out of spirits, that even a trifle such as an overturned cargo of nuts on her carpet must not be suffered to fret her further.

'Eh, Miss Penelope, ye're guid. I canna stoop mysel', I'm that stiff and auld. Thank ye, dearie, thank ye; he meant nae harm, puir fule,' aside; 'whiles he forgets, and — and we a' hae oor days. See to him noo, what's he aboot? Rummagin' himsel' ower frae tap to tae for the rest o' them! See to him noo!' aroused to a faint interest and amusement by the sight of Tosh, with fire in his face, and business in every motion, distractedly hunting in every corner of his capacious person, with obvious expectations of some grand result.

'Whaur is 't? Wha's taen it frae me? What hae I dune

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wi' it?' muttered the poor fellow to himself, consternation gradually stealing over his countenance as the search proved fruitless. 'I had it wi' me — I ken I had — when I went i' the wood to pu' the nits.'

'What is it, Tosh? What have you lost?'

'It's no for you.' Tosh jerked back as though afraid of being touched. 'Let me abee, an I'll fin' it. I ne'er lost siccan a thing afore — no me. Naebody can say but Tosh is aye trusty. An he gied me a saxpence to gie it safe,' beginning to whimper.

'Well, let me put the nuts back in your cap, at any rate,' said Penelope, who was not eager to hold them longer.

'Na, keep them, they're for the captain, and I was to hae seen him mysel' an Carnoustie said I suld, ——'

'Oh, this was the present you were to bring to-morrow? Well, Tosh, I'm sure Captain Ainslie will be proud to receive them. Ailsie, have you a basket, or anything?'

'Ye can tak' them i' my bannet,' Tosh sprang eagerly forward, 'but mind I get it again,' suddenly snatching it back by the tassel, 'I hae nae ither ——'

'That being the case you had better keep it. It would be a risk to send it out of your sight; and see, Tosh, perhaps that is what you have lost; inside the pouch, there; look — that white thing — it looks like a letter.'

Tosh made a snatch. 'It's it! Loshy me! It's it!' he cried joyously; 'I hae na lost it after a',' taking out an envelope and regarding it fondly. Then, thrusting the missive into his breast, 'Nits, or no nits, ye'se no gang intil my Tammy again, makin' a fule o' a puir daft man; I hae ye safe this time,' muttering.

'Is it for any of us, Tosh?' inquired Penelope, shaking the nuts into a basket Ailsie had brought.

'Na,' said Tosh, snappishly. 'Leastways it's no for *you*. An' noo, I mun be gaun,' getting upon his legs.

'Wi' oot yer bit sup, Tosh?' said Ailsie, still in the unwontedly gentle tone she had used throughout the interview, 'there's guid chicken soup for the dinner the nicht, and ye sall hae a basin-full. I'll send for it,' and she rang the bell.

Tosh sat down again. Chicken soup was a temptation against which no call of duty could stand.

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'There's time eneugh — time eneugh,' he appeased his conscience, clapping the pocket which held his recovered treasure. 'It can bide a bittie, an' I hae na lost it,' and thus comforting himself he appeared satisfied, and Penelope left the room. She was asking herself a terrible inquiry: For whom could that mysterious letter be? For whom, and from whom?

Was it wildly improbable that it was from Redwood, and for her cousin Mina? Could it be the formal proposal which she had taught herself daily to expect, and yet which she only half expected? Tosh was often at Inverashet, there would be nothing unlawful, nothing disgraceful, in his being used as a messenger, supposing Redwood had no one handy to send.

Tosh was very faithful. Made to understand his errand, he would go through fire and water to accomplish it; and, of course, there was nothing to prevent Redwood's addressing himself to the young lady personally, all things considered. He might even have spoken to her father already, and received his consent.

'I am certainly a very clever person,' said Penelope to herself, as she mounted one by one the steps to the ante-chamber, wherein Captain Ainslie held his court. 'I divine by instinct. That valuable document over which Tosh rejoiced with such exceeding joy was for Miss Mina Carnoustie, and it was from Mr. Charles Redwood. Bravo, Penelope! And now to fling these nuts at Bob Ainslie's silly head!' turning the door-handle with a jerk, and beginning to chatter like the wind, and to laugh like a thousand mocking birds.

By-and-by she looked round. 'Where is Mina?'

No one knew where Mina was.

'I see her though,' said little Bob the next minute — Bob saw everything and everyone from his window — 'there she is, and your friend Tosh with her. He is giving her something — it looks like a letter!' Penelope's heart stood still. 'He is of a generous disposition,' continued Captain Ainslie, laughing. 'Nuts for me, and a *billet-doux* for your cousin. What next? Does he always go about bestowing his favours like this?'

Penelope could not answer.

'A game of piquet, Miss Penelope?'

Penelope sat down to a game of piquet.

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CHAPTER XLIV.

THE POSTMARK WAS 'LOCHABER.'

SHE was resolved not to force Mina's confidence. She would not go up to her own room early, not run across her cousin on the staircase or in the galleries.

Already she had been reproved for intermeddling, and now supposing that the climax had been reached, she could well perceive she was no longer needed.

Perhaps she also shrank unconsciously from the moment of disclosure. It would be a moment of triumph; a great moment; one to be hailed with effusion, and reflected upon in after-life with thanksgiving, but — she drew back from it a little.

An hour passed. Mina came into the room. Penelope bit her lip and fixed her eyes steadily upon her own and her antagonist's hands. Bob was doing badly, no amalgamations worked luckily for him; whereas Penelope had never held such cards in her life. 'Point of seven. Quint major. Four aces,' she declared; and Captain Ainslie dashed down his wretched outwitted hand in affected fury and despair.

'I never, 'pon my word, I never knew anything like it!' he exclaimed. 'I am the unluckiest beggar. It matters not how I play, there's no doing anything with such hands as I hold tonight. Well, there's one comfort. You know the old saying?'

Penelope knew the old saying well; strange to say, she was repeating it to herself at the moment, though it could have no meaning for her, of course. She might or might not be 'unlucky in love' because she was 'lucky at cards,' she would chance the love and stick to the cards. How was Mina looking? What was she doing? Why was she hovering about in the background?

The query was easily answered. Mina was longing to tell her news, of course. She would expect to be kissed, congratulated, and gushed over; there would be a scene like a page out of a silly novel — bah!

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Mina came and stood over the piquet players, watching the game.

'You are in the light,' said Penelope, peevishly. She did not lift her head, and frowned and was intent upon her play.

Her cousin moved quietly to one side, and Bob held up his hand of cards to scoff at it, and win a third person's pity and sympathy. Did she ever see such cards? It had been the same every round. Before he saw what he had got, he knew when they were being dealt — knew as well as if he saw them — what the lot would be like! It was always the way at piquet. If one began badly, bad luck pursued one all through. He had not had a decent hand yet.

Mina smiled faintly and put a question. 'Eh? Of course not. That would not work at all,' said Bob, in answer. 'You see if I had had the luck to have a knave of this suit, or a queen of that ——'

'What is the use of explaining when she does not know one court card from another,' cried Penelope, rapping the table sharply. 'Do go on, Captain Ainslie. All the talking in the world will not make your hand any better. Mina, I wish you would not stand there. It can't interest you to watch us, when you don't know what we are doing in the least. And I do hate people standing by when I am playing.'

Mina moved away.

'I don't see that *you* need mind, Miss Penelope,' said Bob, jocosely, for he was gratified that she should bestow so much of her attention on the game. Of late he had occasionally felt that when thus engaged her mind was apt to wander. 'Really, you know, I don't say it to be uncivil, but it does not very much signify how you play to-night, you simply can't help scoring. Your cards play themselves. If a whole roomful were buzzing in your ears you would still win every round.'

'There is the dressing gong, and I have been late for dinner every night of late!' Suddenly Penelope dashed down her cards and pushed back her chair. 'Oh, I'm sorry, Captain Ainslie, what do you say?' with a momentary compunction. 'It is "the first good hand you have held"? Oh, I am sorry — really. Pray don't be vexed with me for being so rude and

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cross. I am a little out of humour to-night. I don't know why,' nervously collecting the cards and beginning to thrust them back into their case. 'I have no business to be out of humour, and it is not fair to vent it on an invalid either.'

'Don't mention it,' said Bob gaily, 'Don't mention it' was a little joke between him and Penelope. She tried to smile.

'I am afraid my piquet gets to be rather a bore,' continued he. 'I must teach you some other game for a change. That is if my old doctor is still obdurate; but I really think he ought to release you all of my presence soon now. I am an awful nuisance hanging on like this.'

Before she knew what she was saying, Penelope, with truth in every tone of her voice, was giving assurance whereof she was afraid to think presently, but which, had she but known it, rang the death knell to the gay soldier's hopes.

'A nuisance? I cannot tell you what a *blessing* you are to us all. There are things, there are reasons — I cannot explain — it is impossible to enter into it — but sometimes in a family — Captain Ainslie, you have been out in the world and know many things — if it is any consolation to you for being "left upon our hands," as you call it, I don't think I need mind telling you that if there is one thing I am thankful for every day of my life at present it is for *your being here.* I think we are all glad of it — all. I have not heard one of the Carnousties say a single word to the contrary — among themselves, I mean; people talk plainly when they are among themselves, you know — while, as for me, I am grateful to you — do you understand? — *grateful* to you from the bottom of my heart for your presence.'

'Thank you,' said poor Bob, quietly. He knew what this meant. When she held out her hand and kindly assisted him to rise upright, and when he assured her he required no further aid, but would wait a moment before he hobbled along on his crutches to his room — he had been advanced to crutches a few days previously — he made no attempt to renew the conversation. He resolved Penelope should never think of him differently than as she did now.

In two minutes Penelope had forgotten him altogether. Within her own lighted chamber her eyes had caught sight of

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the expected figure, and with a throb of expectation she already heard in fancy the anticipated announcement.

'Well,' she cried, breathlessly, 'well?'

'I only came in to see if you could give me a thread of silk this shade,' said Mina, holding out a coloured sash ribbon, 'the stitching has come undone, and I know you have a plait of shaded silks. I thought I heard you come upstairs; but it must have been Marie putting out your things.'

Penelope took out the required article.

'How did piquet get on?' said Mina, drawing out the thread she wanted. 'Did Bob do any better after I left?'

'We hardly played any more. I hustled him through the last round. I had an idea that perhaps you — you wanted me.'

'Wanted you, dear?'

'You do not often come and stand over us when we are playing. Are you sure you were not trying to catch my eye? If you have anything to say to me ——'

'Indeed I have nothing.'

Penelope's brow changed like a summer day overcast by a thunderstorm. This was too bad, too insulting. Not to tell her? Not even to trust her now that the *dénouement* which she had furthered, and promoted, and toiled for, had actually taken place! In indignation too great for words, she motioned her cousin to the door, and, muttering something about being late and in haste, closed it, almost turning the intruder out.

The evening passed as other evenings had done. No one seemed important or excited, or in any way different from usual. Captain Ainslie was even a little less cheerful than usual; but they said he must be tired; it was his first day of sitting up at the dinner-table; the exertion excused a little lassitude and an early retirement to his room.

Penelope began to wonder if she had not been the victim of some mistake. She recollected that Mina, with her mother's approval and sanction, had one slight hold upon the outer world, which was always made of importance in the family circle. Mina kept up communications with a former governess who was head of a branch of some benevolent society. Applicants desirous of joining this institution had permission to write to Miss

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Mina Carnoustie; and every now and then a shabby-looking envelope, directed in illiterate handwriting, would come for Mina, sometimes by post, sometimes by messenger.

Might not the letter conveyed by Tosh have been from some island youth or maiden, living at a distance from the castle, and yet imbued by the not unusual idea that a missive delivered by hand would be more likely to receive attention than one sent through the post?

Then Mina, occupied with other and more engrossing thoughts, had forgotten or did not think it worth while to mention the matter. The writer might have been someone in whom she felt no particular interest.

As this possible interpretation grew upon Penelope, her spirits rose.

When nothing had been said by the next day, and when it was evident that no advance had been made towards an understanding by Redwood and her cousin, she was foolishly happy.

She gave Redwood a spirited account of Tosh and his nuts.

'You should have seen me hunting for them all over the carpet, and Tosh seated calmly by, holding his Tam-o'-Shanter. Then he presents it to me, to convey the delectable offering to Captain Ainslie! Then he suddenly becomes wild with dismay because he has lost somewhere upon his important person an important letter wherewith he had been entrusted. Do you ever entrust your letters to him, Mr. Redwood? Oh, he is much in request as letter-carrier in the neighbourhood, and I really should not wish to throw discredit on him because the letter on this occasion was found inside the inner brim of his "Tammy." It would be a very safe place if he did not go nutting in the meantime.'

'Was that where my letter came from?' said Mina, who was on Redwood's other side, the three being separated from the rest of the party. 'I am not sure if I should have received it so readily had I known.'

'Oh, it was for you, was it?' Penelope glanced across.

'From a poor boy I am interested in. He had given it to

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Tosh for me, as he is some way off. Penelope, don't mention it till I have told my mother myself. She likes me to tell her everything first hand.'

'So that was all,' said Penelope, to herself. 'And yet I don't like that "Don't mention it" business beginning again. I am like a burnt child, I suppose. Hi! there is Tosh!' suddenly. 'Tosh — hey — Tosh! Oh dear! how grand you are to-day, Tosh! Oh, beautiful! The captain will admire you! He is to go up to see Captain Ainslie, Mr. Redwood; and doesn't he look nice in his Sunday clothes, and with such a handsome walking-stick too!'

'Aweel, it's no that handsome, it's jist dacent, that's a',' protested Tosh, modestly. 'It's ane o' Carnoustie's, and ye ken he has naethin *handsome* aboot *him*.'

'Ha! ha! ha! do you hear that, uncle, do you hear that?' Penelope flew after the broad back in front, and repeated what Tosh had said. By this movement she did a double stroke of business, drew her uncle's attention to his favourite, and detached herself from Redwood's side. Now that Redwood had not written the mysterious letter, and that he and Mina were still halting and dragging over their courting, she was once more keen to preside over it.

She even set the step of those she joined quicker.

'Come along — come along, you two,' she cried, there being only Joanna on her uncle's other hand. 'Come along, Joanna; you can walk fast, I know. Let us get home and see the fun between Captain Ainslie and Tosh. Send him on in front, uncle,' lower, 'to say we are following.'

Penelope knew that Mina could not walk as briskly as her sisters. She would pant, put her hand to her side, and insensibly lag behind, if the pace were beyond her. She would now be forced to retard Redwood's steps.

With no surprise, therefore, she beheld the distance momentarily increasing between the groups; and soon the pair behind were to all intents and purposes alone.

Another pair of eyes than Penelope's marked this also.

Penelope, however, thought she had been adroit in the extreme, when from the ante-chamber, whither she had accom-

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panied Lord Carnoustie and his protégé, she beheld the two long afterwards coming slowly up the avenue. Redwood had dropped into the way of lunching at the castle on Sundays since Captain Ainslie's accident, and had therefore been able to escort the young lady to her own door; and while Tosh was being put through his facings by her uncle, and while she was outwardly paying the necessary tribute to the scene, in reality she was conjecturing what this long *tête-à-tête* might have brought forth.

She was recalled to attention sharply.

'Well, now you have seen Tosh!' Lord Carnoustie was saying. 'Tosh is a great friend of mine, and a very fine fellow; but I wish you could have seen Torquil — Torquil Macalister — the head shepherd on the home farm. Six feet two in his stocking soles, and the most wonderful line of features! Painters — whew! — they would have given me anything I liked to ask for him. I was proud to show him off to everyone who came. The ladies used to rave about him. But he left us a very short time before you appeared, and I don't know where he is now.'

'I ken,' said Tosh, who had been listening attentively. 'Gif ye dinna ken, Carnoustie, *I* ken. Torquil's no that faur ayont, neither.'

'Too far for you or me to get at him, Tosh.' Lord Carnoustie shook his head regretfully. 'I doubt neither of us will ever set eyes on Torquil Macalister again.'

'Me? I set een on him yestreen,' retorted the fool, contemptuously. 'Set e'en, quotha! 'twas mair than that! We had a crack thegither, an he gied me a saxpence, — but I'm haverin,' as with a sudden thought. 'Torquil's no carin to hae his freens ken he's aboot, an' I was to haud my tongue.'

'Torquil?' exclaimed Lord Carnoustie, bending his brows upon the speaker. 'Are you thinking what you are saying, Tosh? Torquil here? And not come to see me? And not care for me to know he's on the place? I — I should take it very ill of Torquil — but I can't think it's true,' he broke off doubtfully. 'I think you forget a wee bit, Tosh. Wasna that some wee whiley ago ye were seein Torquil an' crackin wi' him?'

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persuasively. 'Afore he left us? A good few Sabbaths ago, maybe four or five; was na that it, Tosh?'

'Mebbe,' said Tosh, sullenly.

'I thought so.' Lord Carnoustie's brow cleared. 'Time passes quietly here, and he is not very good at counting the weeks,' to Captain Ainslie. 'If Torquil Macalister had come back to the island, I know I should not be the last person to hear of it. A good-hearted, grateful fellow, and the best servant ever man had. He would have come to see me before anybody.'

'Humph!' said Tosh.

'Well, Tosh, you have seen the captain, and now I think you had better be going,' proceeded his patron, kindly. 'Duncan,' to the footman who entered at the moment, 'take him along to the kitchen, and see he gets something to eat. Is that dinner, Duncan? I'll be down directly; and, Ainslie, are you coming in to the dining-room? That's right, you are getting on fast now. We shall have you about in no time,' and he stumped away.

Meantime Penelope had turned round a scared and whitened face upon Bob, and as she moved past him he uttered an exclamation of concern.

She silenced it by a wave of her hand. . . .

The next day she went down to Glenmore, and by good fortune found the factor at home as well as his sisters.

'Don't you think Tosh is growing a little more silly than he used to be?' she observed carelessly in the course of conversation. 'When I first came here, about four months ago, I used to have long talks with him, and he often conversed quite sensibly about things within his reach. But now he seems to have illusions. What do you think he said yesterday to Lord Carnoustie and Captain Ainslie? He protested, and stuck to it, that he had seen Torquil Macalister, the shepherd that used to be here, the day before, and that Torquil was in a sort of manner in hiding; at least, Tosh inferred as much; and at first my uncle was quite put out; but when he thought it over, he came to the conclusion that Tosh was talking nonsense, not wilfully, but that he was wandering in his mind.'

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'Tosh was right enough for all that,' said the factor. 'I saw Torquil Macalister myself this morning, away on the other side of the glen, close by Inverashet House. I said to my man Angus, "Is not that Torquil?" and Angus said he had heard Torquil had been seen here and there this week past. I called to him, but he took no notice. Like enough he feels he used us shabbily, bolting off as he did at our busiest time; and I always had it in my mind that it was a flam that story of his about a dying father, whereas the plain truth was he had had the offer of a better place. He was never over well content with his situation as shepherd, whatever face he put upon it. Between ourselves, Miss Penelope, he was a wee thing spoilt by his fine looks and everybody's saying he was such a gentleman. Maybe he hoped to start as a gentleman — as a gentleman keeper I mean — when he went from here; he was fitter for a keeper than for a shepherd, I aye thought; and maybe the place, when he got it, did not just turn out as well as he expected, or he couldn't keep it, or something, and he's back to see what his friends will do for him here. He may be after a place with the duke — there are a wheen men gone from the duke's of late; but anyhow Tosh's eyesight was clear enough, it was Torquil Macalister in the flesh he saw, as it's myself can testify.'

Soon after Penelope took leave; she was going on to the village, to the post-office. She had no foreign stamps left, and there might be some bungle made about her Jamaica letter, if she did not herself have it accurately stamped.

A weight of vague apprehension had fallen on her spirits. Every day seemed to bring something new, yet nothing definite; she was sick and weary of it all. Torquil Macalister again about? Mina again mysterious and perplexing? The secret letter, could it be from Torquil? Or was it only by a coincidence that he should be on the island when her cousin was being applied to in regard to the benevolent institution?

It was quite possible that Mina knew nothing of Torquil's return. She had exerted herself more than usual in Redwood's presence during the last few days; Redwood had been at the castle constantly; that the names of the two were being coupled

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together, Penelope shrewdly guessed, and moreover that the topic was in everybody's mouth.

'It is very wrong of that man to have come back at all, and very tiresome that he should have chosen this time of all others,' reflected Penelope; 'but I dare say he will be careful not to come near us. As Mr. Soutter says, he may want to be employed by the duke, and if he keeps away at the other end of the island, he may consider he is holding to his word. These sort of people have their own ideas. At any rate, I am too tired and disheartened to do anything. I dare say all will go right if it is let alone,' and she attended to her postage, and left the little shop after despatching her letter.

'Hey — stop — hey,' the post-mistress's younger sister ran after the young lady. 'Wad ye be so guid,' she panted, coming up alongside, 'as tell Miss Meena there's been a letter waitin' for her here this week past? She kens aboot it. She said there wad be nae mair, and she's no been doun-bye since. But it's here, and we was feared to send it up, as we had been bidden no.'

Penelope stood still.

'Will you please tell me all that over again?' she said in her clear, pleasant voice. 'I should like to be very particular about the exact words of your message.'

The girl repeated as nearly as possible her request.

'Miss Mina used to come down for letters?'

'For ane. No for ithers. Ilka Monday i' the forenoon. She never missed.'

'Till when?'

'She didna come — stop — the Monday 'fore last she had her letter; an' the end o' the week it micht be, she said there wad be nae mair; but it cam', an' we hae na kenned what to dae wi' 't.'

'You were not allowed to put it in the letter-bag?'

'Na.'

'Did Miss Mina say why?'

'Oo, aye; thae letters aye bit to be answered by the neist post oot. An' it saved time if she jist steppit doon, and had them and answered them i' the shop. It was business; and it's a twa days' post to Lochaber.'

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'To Lochaber!' Penelope sickened. 'To Lochaber!' she repeated. Torquil Macalister was a Lochaber man.

'The post-mark was "Lochaber,"' explained the girl, apologetically. 'We aye kenned it was Miss Meena's letter when it cam frae Lochaber; for she had bidden us tak' heed o't oorsels. She said we was to gie her "Lochaber" letter to naebody but hersel.'

'Very well,' said Penelope, quietly. 'I will give her your message.

'Faithless, treacherous girl!' She turned away, wringing her hands beneath her plaid. 'False to her word — false to me — to Redwood — to everyone! From beginning to end she has been hoodwinking us all! It must have been going on from the very first. I remember how soon her cheerfulness returned! How quickly she seemed consoled! How aptly she fell in with every suggestion I made! It was easy to say "Yes" to everything, while *this* was going on! Oh! now I well believe who employed poor Tosh on Saturday; the same person whose last letter lies at this moment in Jess McFadyan's keeping; the same whose post-mark was ever to be "Lochaber." Ha! Who is that?' She started, and with difficulty suppressed a scream.

There was a low wall on one side of the road which led from the village to the castle; and something moved behind the wall. The next minute a face looked over it.

'One of the watchers setting his rabbit traps,' said Penelope to herself. But she quickened her pace, and looking the other way, drew a breath of relief as she passed the spot. The watcher, if it were one, remained perfectly still, and had probably again crouched over his traps. The days were beginning to draw in, and the dusk was not far off, though it was but five o'clock.

It was a mild autumnal evening, perfectly still, but for the splashing of the high tide, which washed the rocky shore almost at Penelope's feet, as she hastened along. Years afterwards she recalled the measured sound of the waves, and the sight of a large black cormorant, which, settled upon an oily herring streak, was fishing and gobbling almost upon their edge. She

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turned her head to watch the bird for a moment; he was a fine fellow, and enjoying himself famously. Willing to divert her thoughts, and being now within a hundred yards of the lodge, she might halt and watch the pretty sight, — nay, she would fetch her uncle down to see the cormorant. It would be an excuse for not going into the house; for not seeing Mina.

Would Lord Carnoustie be at home? If not, he might be on the road behind her, it being that which led to his distant shooting-ground, — and she turned to look. Two figures were approaching. A second glance enabled her to perceive whose they were.

A flush of indignation burned in Penelope's cheek. 'Still carrying on the farce?' muttered she. 'Befooling this honest-hearted man, only to cheat him worse than he has been cheated before! Ah, he is in a worse plight now than he was then. Oh, Mina, Mina! you wicked, base, treacherous — *What's that?*' A fresh alarm: a new spasm of apprehension! She shook with terror, her limbs trembled beneath her. For what did her starting eyes perceive?

The stealthy figure behind the wall creeping forward with a soft, gliding, snake-like motion; and again a man's face peering over the mossy summit, as from a lurking-place.

'Who is that?' gasped Penelope, her heart thundering. 'What does that man want? What is he doing there?' The face was turned from her, half hidden by a slouching cap; but the form of the head — the breadth of shoulder — it could be none other than '*Torquil!*' The scream died in her throat. '*Torquil!* Oh, my God, it is *Torquil!* . . . Oh, God, . . . help them! It is *Torquil* who lies in wait! . . . Oh, God! — Oh, help! — They are coming — they are coming; — and there is murder in his face! . . .' She tried to shriek, to call aloud, but not a syllable would come, and yet nearer and nearer sounded the gay voices, as Redwood and Mina with one accord loudly hailed her, shouting to make their presence known, as they perceived her attention fixed upon another quarter. The next moment she had flown across the road — ah! . . . a blinding flash before her eyes! An echoing report! A cloud of blue, hanging smoke! Through the horror of it all she could see her

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cousin, her cousin Mina, stagger, reel, and fall, heavily fall, to the ground.

The next moment an unseen hand knocked up the muzzle of the murderer's rifle, and his second bullet flew wide above Redwood's head.

With an oath Torquil Macalister sprang from his retreat, and before Redwood, who had rushed forward, could scale the barrier between the two had dashed across the broken moorland in the rear, and was lost to view in the gathering shadow of the mountain.

On the roadside lay Mina Carnoustie, her life-blood ebbing fast away.

CHAPTER XLV.

'THEY WILL FIND TORQUIL MACALISTER THERE TO-MORROW.'

'Is she dead?' whispered Penelope.

She had staggered to the spot where Redwood knelt beside her cousin, and both felt as though the question scarcely needed a reply.

Mina, however, made a movement, sighed, and unclosed her eyes.

'Oh!' cried Penelope, joyously. But Redwood turned his head, and checked her with a look. 'Fly to the castle,' said he, with hoarse imperative urgency. 'Fly. There is not a moment to lose. I will do what I can till you return, but we must have help quickly — *quickly* — or — Heavens! is she gone?' She had sunk down again, seemingly inanimate.

Penelope clasped her hands, and both hung in breathless suspense for the next few moments.

There was another sign of life; Redwood looked up and nodded; Penelope understood, and as swiftly as her trembling limbs could bear her, sped along the level road, and turning in at the castle gates, was almost instantly lost to view.

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'She will hardly last till they come,' said Redwood to himself. 'What can be the meaning of it? If only I could have gone after the villain ——'

'Mr. Redwood,' said a voice in his ear. It was that of the dying girl, who had again opened her eyes, fixed them upon him, and was struggling for speech, obviously with all the powers still left her. Could there be any hope of life? But the blood was pouring from a wound whose extent he could not calculate, and he feared the worst. He laid his hand across her mouth. 'Do not speak. Save yourself. Help will soon be here.'

'Too late for me,' said Mina, faintly. 'It is no matter. *He* has killed me; but it was not cruel of him, as you think. He only did it because we loved each other so; he could not bear to see me with you. Tell him I forgive him. Tell him, *Torquil* — that though he killed me, I —— forgive him ——'

'The scoundrel!' exclaimed Redwood, scarcely believing his senses. 'There is some hideous mistake. He has confused you with some other person?'

A flickering smile just showed on her panting lips.

'Mistake? Torquil mistake *me!*' Suddenly the mind, resolved upon freeing itself, surmounted the gathering torpor of the physical frame, and, with an energy of which the moment before she had seemed incapable, Mina Carnoustie proceeded. 'Mr. Redwood, I must speak. Hold up my head! — Hold it higher! — There! I can see you now. I shall not be able to see you in a few minutes. Are you listening? Listen, and don't forget, *don't forget*,' with broken intensity of emphasis, 'what I say. Torquil Macalister loved me, and I loved him, and there was no hope. Penelope — she ——' breath was rapidly failing. He had to wait till she had acquired another effort. Then he gently put the thread into her hands again.

'Penelope?' he suggested.

'She knew; she found out. It was that day after the water party. She was very angry — very, *very* angry. . . . She made Torquil go away. . . . And she said — she said . . .' again the voice died out.

'What did she say?' besought he, straining every nerve to hear.

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'She said that if you and I — that if I would accept you as a lover — it would save me.'

'*She* said so? *Penelope?*' He bit his lip, which twitched cruelly.

'It was her plan to save me. She meant to be kind . . . She did not understand. . . .'

'And she wished you to marry me?' said Redwood, with a cold knife at his heart. 'Oh yes, I have no doubt she meant to be kind — to you,' bitterly.

A gleam of intelligence lighted up the dying girl's eyes. 'It *was* kind,' she said, 'because,' on a sudden she reared herself almost upright, and gripped him by the arm with vice-like fingers, 'because Penelope *loves you herself.* She does. She does.' Again the last syllables faded into an inarticulate murmur.

Redwood, who had uttered a startled exclamation, remained now absolutely petrified from amazement.

'I am dying. Won't you believe me?' whispered poor Mina. 'I shall be dead in a few minutes. Would I lie to you now? I have not been a truthful girl; I did pretend to — to — do what Penelope asked me, and I did deceive her and you, and everybody. But I am going now — going — going . . . Dear Penelope — she ——'

'But is this true? Can it be *true?*' demanded Redwood, passing his hand over his brow. 'Forgive me, for I ought not to encourage you to speak. No, you must not speak: never mind what you had to say: it is no matter ——'

She made an imploring gesture. 'It is the truth — what I said, — do you believe me? Oh, you must — you must believe me.' Again his arm was passionately held, the while she struggled for breath.

'I *will* believe you. Only be silent. Only keep still, and wait till others come.'

'Others? I shall not see them. Kiss Penelope from me. And remember — remember ——' but he could not learn what it was he was to remember.

'My parents, my sisters,' suddenly exclaimed Mina — 'Ah! how dark it is! Who is here? Who?' Voices and steps were heard approaching.

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'Thank God! they are come at last,' cried Redwood, 'but——' his lips fell apart.

There was a tremor of the form he held, and an ashen shade fell over the face. The glazed orbs opened once widely, convulsively; there was no light nor consciousness within them; gradually the eyelids sank, and as the foremost runner fell on her knees beside the spot, the spirit of Mina Carnoustie passed away from earth.

. . . . . .

Who can depict the awful moments which now followed? Every few seconds brought fresh arrivals to the darkened roadside, where a dimly outlined group still endeavoured vainly to restore animation to the lifeless form.

'I fear, my lord, I fear there is no use attempting more;' a hand was at length laid upon the shoulder of the distracted father. 'We have tried everything,' said John Soutter, mournfully. 'My lord, I fear——'

But Lord Carnoustie shook him off. 'Everything? It's easy to say "everything." Can't you think of *anything*, some of ye?' cried he, glaring round. 'A useless, jabbering pack!' as his ear caught a few broken murmurs. 'She *can't* be dead — it's — it's nonsense, I tell you!' in a high key. 'You'll let her die, that's what you'll do among ye, standing gaping there! Here, Redwood, you have some sense, don't let her slip away while these fools are looking on open-mouthed. Get away with ye all, if ye're no good,' stamping his foot at the cowering circle. 'Redwood? — Penelope ——?'

'His lordship wishes you to convey the——' Redwood, who had begun calmly, here lost his voice. He indicated however the motionless form on which every eye was bent. 'To the castle,' he subjoined, hurriedly. Then he took Lord Carnoustie's arm, and without a word led him forward.

'Aye, to the castle; of course, to the castle. These dolts would have let her lie there all night! Ye hear what he says? Obey him then, can't ye?' scowling round. Then turning again to Redwood, 'That was a good thought of yours, Redwood. The doctor will be at the castle; he'll know what to do. My poor wife! Redwood, I — I can't think. Mina is her

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darling, — but we'll bring her round — we'll bring her round. The doctor will bring her round in no time, — McWhinnock is a clever fellow. How was it, Redwood? They told me, but I forget. Your gun went off ——'

— 'Not mine,' said Redwood, hastily.

'*A* gun. Some nasty, poaching rascal, without so much as a license even, you may take your oath. I'll have him prosecuted. He has nearly killed my daughter — *my* daughter. I — I can't think of it yet. It was an awful sight — her poor mother ——'

'I trust Lady Carnoustie will not meet us,' said Redwood, rapidly considering. 'If she could be got out of the way ——' he looked over his shoulder.

'Send Penelope on in front. Here, I'll send her,' and the old man stood still, and turned round. Put when he attempted to call Penelope's name his dry throat refused its office.

What he beheld was indeed a spectacle to paralyse the tongue of any parent.

Beneath the ancestral trees which formed a canopy overhead, there wound, with measured tread, the silent *cortège*, every head uncovered, every face bent upon the ground. It might have been — he felt it was — a funeral procession.

'Good God, do they think she is *dead?*' As though it were a new and unexpected thought, Lord Carnoustie gave vent to the passionate ejaculation, and brought his startled eyes back to Redwood's face. '*Dead?*' he whispered.

Redwood bowed his head.

The old man fell against him: would have fallen over had he not been upheld.

But the next moment Redwood was again vehemently urged forward.

'Quick — haste — come on — come on. Get there before them, Redwood. For God's sake, get there before them — my poor wife! — my poor wife! Whatever happens, Redwood, keep it from my poor wife. Let us get in, and find her.'

It was clear that with him the worst was now past. After accompanying him to the hall door and seeing him disappear

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upon his merciful errand, Redwood could hold himself in readiness to render assistance to others who might require it.

'Let the young ladies go by,' whispered the factor, taking him by the coat, as the weeping Joanna, accompanied by Penelope, emerged from the rest; 'let them win in, poor things. Miss Louisa's with her mother. Then we can see what to do.'

He held a hurried consultation with the household, and returned to Redwood.

'They say it will be best to take her to her own apartment. To lay her down anywhere else might show too plainly — if we can keep up the idea that there's *hope*, if it's but for an hour, till the family can get over the first shock, d'ye see, Mr. Redwood?'

'Is there anything I can do?' said Redwood, abruptly.

'Surely. You can go and tell Captain Ainslie, and keep him quiet. Or — but maybe you wouldn't like to do that?'

'I should like to do anything. Make me of any use. As for Ainslie, doubtless he knows already, and his own feelings will prompt him to remain out of sight. What can I do for you?'

'There's the Fiscal,' whispered Mr. Soutter, in his ear. 'There must be an inquest, and — and you could best lay before him the information, since you were present. It's murder, Mr. Redwood, as I understand it — murder; and the murderer has escaped! We shall have other things to think of than just this poor bairn's funeral — wae's me, that such a thing should be! But if we could leave the house to themselves,' and he looked round.

Obviously his attention was being waited for, and several now pressed forward with whispered questions and suggestions. He stepped aside: the group moved forward and passed up the broad staircase, and he returned to Redwood. 'Dr. McWhinnock can't be got. He's at the other side of the island to-day. If I could have left him here — but it's plain I must stay myself now. So, Mr. Redwood, I will make bold to put this matter in your hands. There's my dog-cart at the door.'

'Certainly. I will go at once.'

'Lay the information before the Fiscal, — that's Mr. William

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Turnbull. My man Angus,' walking with Redwood to the door, 'here he is, he knows where Mr. Turnbull lives. Carnoustie himself is a J. P., but then, where's the good of him now?' mournfully. 'Angus will take you to Mr. Turnbull's house, and he — or his clerk, if he is not at home — will take the necessary steps. Was it — was it really Torquil Macalister who fired the shot, Mr. Redwood?' suddenly stepping close to Redwood's side, and dropping his voice so as to be overheard by no one.

'Beyond a doubt. I saw the man distinctly.'

'A case of mistaken identity, I suppose,' said Mr. Soutter, looking him steadily in the face. 'Or else Torquil has suddenly become insane. At any rate he must be secured. It is hopeless to think of catching him to-night,' looking out at the darkened sky. 'That is to say, if he sticks to the hills. No one could find him there, if he chose to hide. He knows every crag and corrie, every nook and rocky shelter, — and I wouldn't be the man to approach him forbye, if he has his gun ——'

'He had: he waved it as he sprang up the moor.'

'And bullets in plenty about him, I'll warrant. He'll be best approached cannily. We must inveigle him down by stratagem, or maybe he'll give himself up, if he's mad — really mad. And of course he's mad, Mr. Redwood — and so I told Miss Penelope. It was she who screamed out Torquil's name — but that's no matter — no matter. You tell Mr. Turnbull how it happened, and beg him to come over soon, as soon as possible: meantime I'll wait with the family. Good-bye, Mr. Redwood. The Lord speed you! It's an awful thing — an awful, fearful thing. If you should just happen to see my sisters in the bye-gaun, Mr. Redwood?'

'I will, certainly. On my return I will stop at Glenmore. After which, Mr. Soutter, unless you should happen to want me, there seems to be no occasion for my returning here. I should not see any of the family again to-night. Perhaps you would kindly despatch a messenger to Inverashet to let my servants know to send to Glenmore for me in an hour's time? I will leave your dog-cart there, and get into my own.' He then departed.

A few hours later and all was silence in the mourning house.

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Busy steps and hurried consultations had ceased. Doors no longer opened and shut; a hush had fallen even upon weeping and wailing, and whoever kept vigil, kept it in solitude and apart.

Of this number was Penelope: what deeper meaning the fatal tragedy of the afternoon had for her than for others was known, she believed, to herself alone, and the relief of sharing her agony with anyone was denied her. In vain she sought in the countenance of one and another, to whom she was called upon to narrate what she had witnessed, indications of any suspicion of the truth. All were lost in simple bewilderment, and the alternating explanations suggested by Mr. Soutter were accepted without demur.

But could this ignorance be sustained? It could and it must. She would die before she disclosed her own terrible knowledge: and who or what else could betray? All at once the watcher started to her feet.

She was within her own turret chamber, and it was next to the chamber of death. It had not been suggested that she should change to another room, and she had not cared to trouble anyone with the proposal at such a time. It mattered little, she told herself; but now — now in the light of a new thought, it mattered much, and mattered on the right side. Something had recurred to her recollection which made her regard the near neighbourhood of that white veiled apartment as of strange value.

'I must do it — I must!' she cried. For she now knew — it seemed as if on a sudden she knew everything — why Mina had so persistently kept locked a certain tiny cabinet which Penelope had often admired, a quaintly fashioned piece of furniture, with a carved front, and coarse, strong lock. 'They are in there, they are, they must be!' she panted. 'Those "Lochaber" letters, and — and who knows what besides? I must get them, and destroy them. If they are found — oh, my poor Mina, even your father's and your mother's tears for you would be dried, and they would almost thank God for your death that saved their pride disgrace.'

She paused a minute and pondered.

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'That was the key which was taken from her neck, and laid upon the dressing-table. It is under the white cloth. I know the place. If I can but get the key and open the cabinet, or carry off the cabinet, — but no, it would be missed, and to-morrow the key might be gone, — to-night is my only chance. What excuse can I make to steal in? Ailsie is there — poor, poor Ailsie! She knows, but she thinks I do not know, and I — it is no time to talk with her now if I ever do. Driven to the worst, I might be forced, but I will try something else first. . . . Yes, that will do. It is true I have eaten nothing, and Ailsie could not refuse. . . . ' Bracing herself for the effort, she turned the handle of the door and glided within.

Ailsie sat by the fire, an old, old woman, bent double.

Penelope went up and whispered to her.

'My puir bairn, yes,' said the faithful creature, rising immediately. 'I'll see t'ye. I can get ye something hot i' my ain room; only for leavin' this,' and she paused with momentary irresolution.

'I will stay here, I am not afraid,' said Penelope, breathing fast. Instinctively her eye went over to the cabinet, distinctly outlined, but now veiled like the rest, and she experienced an involuntary sensation of relief at finding it in its usual place by the fireside, not near the bed, — 'if you would be so kind, dear Ailsie?'

In another minute she had snatched the key from the toilet-table, unpinned the napkin which dropped from the glossy wood of the cabinet, opened it, and withdrawn its contents, consisting of letters forming a small packet, a few bunches of withered flowers, and the silver brooch which had been lost on the moor and brought back by the idiot Tosh.

Slipping these into her pocket, and peering anxiously into every corner, she could discern nothing more, and with a sigh of satisfaction turned the lock again, and replaced the key where it had been before.

All was done so quickly that the old nurse had scarcely descended the turret staircase ere Penelope's mission was accomplished.

She now wished she had thought of some slighter errand on

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which to despatch her messenger. Would Ailsie be long? Must she wait where she was? Could she not step back into her own room and wait there till she heard steps returning, when she could flit across and regain poor Mina's bedchamber before Ailsie knew?

Yet no; she had promised she would stay, and such a promise must be sacredly kept. She turned to the window, and softly drew up the blind to let in the silver moonlight. Not a cloud dimmed the brilliancy of the firmament, and far and wide the landscape could be seen clear and ghostly.

'I wonder where he is now?' Penelope's thoughts reverted with a shudder to the murderer at large upon the heights. 'It was there I saw him first,' gazing; 'on that heathery knoll poor Mina pointed him out to me; and on that same spot she lost his brooch afterwards. It must have been a marked place with them — a trysting place — a ——' Suddenly her eyeballs started from their sockets, and her arms flew up above her head.

Upon the moor, upon the very point on which her gaze was bent, there flashed out a bright blue flame, a lightning stroke — a what? The same instant a faint unmistakable report fell upon her ear, in the hush of night.

'He was right to choose that place,' muttered Penelope, white to the lips. 'They will find Torquil Macalister there to-morrow.'

CHAPTER XLVI.

A TERRIBLE MEETING PLACE.

It was midnight on the moor.

A full, brilliant moon lit up the rugged mountain range behind, and spread a silver sheet upon the wide expanse of waters below.

Not a sound broke the surrounding stillness. The hoarse croak of the raven and the quivering cry of the curlew were

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alike mute. Even the monotonous rhythm of plunging cataracts was so muffled as to be inaudible at any distance, a week of drought having dwindled every mountain stream.

It was a strange place for anyone to seek at that weird hour.

Who then could this be emerging from the larch wood which skirted the open hillside? Whose this form casting its black shadow behind as it flitted up the stony track?

A woman's?

But what woman would dare cross that wild and lonely pass at such a time? What purpose could be served by choosing the dead of night to sally forth alone among solitudes so awful?

Is it a moorland lassie? A fisher maiden? Aye, by the simple tartan plaid which clings around her shrinking figure and wraps her else uncovered head — no, by the dainty slipper already cut and torn through contact with the jagged roadway.

Bare hands held fast the folds of the plaid, but on the hands shone diamonds.

Penelope had not stopped to think about such things. She had caught up a covering, the first that lay near, more with the intent of concealing her person than as a protection from the elements, and had sallied forth otherwise unprepared.

But what could be the errand which had drawn a timid young girl to such a region, at such a time?

An appalling errand.

With a shock of horror Penelope had realised on becoming the involuntary witness of the last dreadful act of the day's tragedy — for so she divined it to be — that with the removal of all incriminating relics from among her cousin's possessions, she had accomplished only half her task, since it was but too probable that Torquil Macalister had his tell-tale treasures also.

Strange to say, with Torquil alive and at large, Penelope had not thought of this; it was only when the solitary shot upon the heights conveyed its own ominous interpretation to her brain, that she perceived the threatening of a new danger.

Torquil in his fury and madness had killed himself, failing to kill Redwood.

In Redwood he had beheld his supposed rival, a rival with

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whom he had no power to compete, and whom he had doubtless found was looked upon by everyone as Lord Carnoustie's future son-in-law.

Rumours of this had probably reached him in his banishment; stung by the thought he had flung his word to the winds, and stealthily returned to see and hear for himself; Mina's representations had failed to satisfy him, and love and jealousy united in his savage breast had rendered him indifferent to everything but revenge.

Whether or not had he succeeded in accomplishing this to its fullest extent he might have put an end to his own life thereafter, would never be known; but, foiled in his second aim, he had in all probability fled, in order to await another opportunity; and, indeed, Penelope had, unknown to all, been shuddering over the frightful possibility awakened by this conjecture.

How should she warn Redwood? How tell him that his life was thirsted for by a desperate man. Nay that, but for her, he had already been lying cold and stiff as Mina was?

It had been with a transient sense of escape from peril dire and threatening that the terrified witness of Torquil's latest crime comprehended its full significance, and realised that, overmastered by his own dark thoughts, wild and mad with grief, and despairing of further vengeance, he had turned his weapon against his own heart, and put himself for ever beyond the reach of man.

No more was to be feared from him, no revelations, no accusations.

Had such taken place, they might of course have been passed off as the ravings of a madman; but how if supported by indisputable proof? Letters, for instance. It was at this instant that Penelope experienced the thrill of that new apprehension to which we have already alluded.

On the morrow Torquil's dead body would be found.

In the course of the evening she had heard, with perceptions rendered painfully acute, various projects for hunting down the criminal discussed by the functionaries who had assembled at the castle, and in whose presence she had supported her uncle.

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The armed bands to be organised would naturally patrol the nearer portion of the moor where foot-passengers were frequent. And as the knoll on which the suicide had fallen was well in sight of the beaten track, he would be perceived instantly.

Then how if no one had been beforehand with the searchers?

That Torquil had been ofttimes indifferent to, nay, reckless of, discovery, Penelope had only too good reason to know already; for while Mina had been abjectly terrified by the mere possibility of detection, his ignorance and presumption had made it by no means unendurable in his eyes. Mina had owned he had spoken of another country, and a fresh start in life; and he had more than once acted as though self-effacement and concealment were becoming too irksome. To be bought off by a miserable father, and sent to the antipodes with his wife — even though sent in anger and disgrace — had naturally seemed a more satisfactory prospect to the low-born rustic than to Lord Carnoustie's daughter, and it was quite likely that he had returned to the island prepared to face it. If so, prudence would be the last thing to be expected, and everything the hapless Mina had ever given or written, everything he had cared to keep, would be found upon his person.

The thought was torture, but Penelope could see no escape from it.

Torquil Macalister lay dead upon a spot whereof she alone knew at the present moment, — but all the world would know it on the morrow.

After that, every hope of preserving untarnished poor Mina's name must be abandoned; and the coarse tongues of the vulgar would not only blazon the tale far and wide, and hand it down to generations yet unborn, but would cast upon her folly inferences and interpretations such as the weak, erring girl had never dreamed of.

Penelope groaned aloud. She, and she alone, was the guardian of her dead cousin's fair fame. On her it rested to preserve or let it go. But what an enterprise did such a conviction now demand!

She *must* go — she *could* not. She would dare anything — she dared not this thing. Now she would start upright, and

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clench her teeth resolute, courageous; anon she would sink down despairing, weeping, wringing her hands.

Finally, on her knees she fell.

. . . . . .

After that Penelope seemed to apprehend nothing distinctly till she found herself out in the great shining space, beneath the midnight sky.

If it had been darker she could have borne it better; there would not have been visible those fantastic shapes which challenged terror and inquiry on every hand; there would not have been her own black shadow dogging her steps.

Nay, until she stood out upon the open moor she had got on fairly well. The wood was often dark even in the daytime, and she was not by nature of a nervously timorous disposition; so that even now she had traversed its windings running swiftly and striving to keep her thoughts where they had last been directed in prayer; but it was harder to keep her eyes from straying and her heart from racing when the nature of the ground made it a necessity to slacken speed; added to which there was the sense of being engulfed by a vast empty space, whence at any moment might spring phantoms, creatures of the night. Ha! did not something then go by?

It seemed years since she had put the same question on the shore road. She had been startled then, apprehensive of she knew not what, — but now, she stood still, — she was within sight of the knoll, and on the knoll — yes — there was — there was — *the thing* she sought!

Penelope clasped her hands across her breast. Her eyes dilated; she could have seen *that* at twice the distance.

And now to leave the track and approach her goal.

For a few moments she stayed her panting steps, and strove to re-animate her courage by all the arguments which had erst inspired it; then slowly and falteringly began to creep across the heather and moss heaps.

Suppose it were not Torquil after all who lay there? Suppose her whole theory had been built upon a baseless foundation; and if it were indeed the murderer, he were only resting on his heathery bed, still harbouring dread intentions in his

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breast, still prepared to fill up the measure of his crimes. Her own had been the hand which turned aside his deadly aim at Redwood, and with his vengeance on Redwood yet unsated, would he be likely to spare her if she were now to throw herself unprotected into his power?

The dark object on the height showed no signs of life.

Penelope closed her eyes for a moment. 'I am sure God sees me now,' she whispered to herself, 'and though I have been wrong, and foolish, and self-willed, and have helped to bring about all this, He has forgiven me, and is pleased with this one poor little act of atonement. He may suffer me to be frightened, that I deserve; but I do not think He will allow any real harm to come to me.'

Then she stumbled on a few steps, and hit a loose stone with her foot, and it fell clattering down the hillside.

How loud was its sharp, ringing, noisy progress. Loud enough to — oh God! — to raise —— to wake —— the *dead!*

For, apparently roused by the disturbance, there started up on the instant, full in view of her affrighted vision, the apparition of a man; and with a shriek such as had never before rent the wild echoes of that lonely place, Penelope reeled, tottered, and fell heavily on the turf.

But it was neither Torquil Macalister alive or dead who arose from the purple heather.

Torquil still lay there stretched on his wild bed, with a bullet through his heart; his cold hand clutching the instrument of his own destruction. It was someone else who had been on the ground beside the lifeless body, who was the next instant bending over the unconscious girl, and who could himself only find voice for the single word, 'Penelope!'

Redwood knew however, as by a lightning flash of revelation, what had brought Penelope thither, and that her mission was the same as his own. She had seen what he had seen; she had been quick as he to interpret its meaning and to apprehend its significance; and like himself she had resolved to protect, at whatever cost, the fair fame of Mina Carnoustie.

Every word uttered by the murdered girl had burned itself into Redwood's brain; more especially every word about Pene-

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lope. Penelope loved him, and for Mina's sake had put her love aside! That was naturally uppermost in the whirling chaos of his thoughts, but he recollected also that Penelope alone knew of Mina's fatal attachment, and that Penelope alone held the key to what seemed in the eyes of others an outbreak of pure insanity on the part of Mina's destroyer.

Yet to meet Penelope thus!

The covering fell from Penelope's head, and her countenance, white as death, dismayed Redwood by its ecstasy of terror.

'Good God!' he exclaimed, 'is this to be another victim? Penelope, my darling,' raising her in his arms, 'open your eyes. Look at me. You know who it is. I — your friend. I startled you, and no wonder, meeting you thus; but now — no one shall harm you — no one. *I* am here. *I* will protect you; that is right; look at me. You understand who it is, don't you? Never mind the rest; think only you are safe with me, poor child — poor, poor child. To think of your attempting this — you brave, noble girl. . . . It is over now, — yes look up; you know it is I, don't you?' soothing her with his touch. 'Ah, don't draw away. You cannot stand alone, indeed you cannot; let me hold you. Nay, you must; you don't know what you are doing,' as, still half stupefied, and wholly bewildered, she kept feebly endeavouring to free herself.

'Dear,' said Redwood, taking both her hands in his, and speaking slowly and distinctly as to a young child, 'will you try to understand? I love you, and I am here to protect you. You are no longer alone; you are with *me*.'

She trembled from head to foot, and cast a shuddering glance over her shoulder.

'Yes, he lies there,' said Redwood, divining her thoughts, 'he will never move again, poor fellow. It was as well he killed himself; there was nothing else left for him to do, and we who know his story ——,' he paused, significantly.

She started, all attention. He was right; he had struck home at last.

'Let me fold this round you,' — his arm remained within the encircling fold — 'come from this fearful place,' pleaded Redwood, 'we are no longer needed; I had accomplished what I

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came to do some minutes before you appeared; but I lingered to make assurance doubly sure; now, come,' and he gently strove to draw her away, but she tottered and would have fallen, while her mute eyes sought his with a gaze of agonised appeal.

'Yes?' said Redwood, meeting it.

Then Penelope essayed to speak, but only broken and inarticulate murmurs escaped her lips. Still she looked restlessly, piteously, while the unsatisfied misery in her eyes for the moment baffled his conjectures. At last 'I have it!' thought he, and produced from his breast-pocket a small packet wrapped in a coloured handkerchief wet with blood.

'Everything is here,' he whispered, '*everything*. Not a trace will be found for the tongues of strangers to gossip over. You wish me to give it you?' reluctantly, (for she had held out her hand). 'Will it not do if I promise to destroy every fragment, to burn it all, the instant I get home? I will look at nothing, open nothing. Believe me this packet is safer with me than with you; and if you can trust me ——'

She made a gesture of assent.

'You are satisfied — quite satisfied?'

Another movement.

'Then let me take you home now? If we wait,' he scanned the moor on every side, 'others as well as we may have had their attention drawn to this spot; and should you and I be found here together ——'

A crimson flush overspread her pallid countenance, and he felt that consciousness and perception were returning.

'Already I fancy I see something. There, on the crest of the hill,' proceeded he, with a pardonable wile. 'It may be only cattle, but we are not secure of — you would not wish to be found here,' speaking low in her ear, 'alone with me?'

Her head fell lower. She made a hurried movement, and half fell in the attempt.

'Indeed you are not fit to walk,' urged Redwood, tendering support. 'You have already strained your strength too far. Ah, take care!' as she stumbled over a loose stone, 'may I not? Well try; but I know you cannot,' standing back for a minute.

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She made a few feeble steps, and came to a dizzy standstill, putting her hand before her eyes.

'It is useless to attempt it,' said Redwood. 'Dear, you must not be angry with me, but you must submit to me now. Your heart is too full to listen to my love,' — he paused, — 'but I shall claim to tell it presently. Now, will you obey me? Yes?' his arm pressing closely around her. 'Yes? Ah, say "Yes," Penelope, dear Penelope! I can't do anything till you say "Yes."'

'Yes,' she sobbed. He stooped his head over hers for an instant; when he raised it his eyes were shining proudly. 'Now, one moment,' he said, loosening the long plaid scarf from her person, and hastily passing it across his own shoulders, then winding it again around her, whilst she appeared only half conscious of the action. 'Now put your arms round my neck,' said Redwood, bending his head. 'Quick,' as he felt her hesitate. 'We may be surprised if we linger; every minute is precious; and,' softly, 'you promised to obey me ——'

First one arm and then the other slowly crept round. He put up his hand and linked them together. 'Hold firmly, and I can carry you with ease.' Redwood then lifted his fair burden from the ground; and twisting the plaid tightly round her and himself, and bringing it round again to the front — as he had seen mountaineers do when carrying helpless animals — he found her weight nothing, and easily regained the beaten track.

After a few minutes' hurried walking a light whisper was breathed into his ear. 'Mr. Redwood?'

He stopped to hear more plainly.

'Are they coming?'

'They? Who, my darling?'

'Those people you spoke of. Are they there? Will they see us?'

He had forgotten to what she alluded, but, after a moment's reflection, turned and looked back. In the glittering moonlight every broken bit of moorland, every ragged and fantastic outline was clearly discernible for some distance, but no living object was in sight.

'No one is there, Penelope.'

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'You would take care of me, would you not? You would not let them find us?'

'Are you my own Penelope?'

She breathed quickly. He felt she understood.

'Be sure I will protect my own,' said Redwood, lifting a hand to adjust the covering which had fallen from her shoulder. 'All the world does not matter, now that you have given yourself to me. Do not be afraid; we are still alone — quite alone,' in spite of himself there was a ring of exultation in the whispered assurance. 'Be content. You are safe. You are *mine*,' and he walked rapidly on.

Soon they regained the edge of the wood, and plunging within its sheltering recesses, it seemed as though half the terror of the night were left behind.

'We are close at hand now,' murmured Penelope, to whom life was slowly coming back. 'I could walk now ——'

'Hush! Hush! You shall walk presently. Lie still but a few minutes more,' the rapid descent continuing. 'You are so easy to carry,' proceeded Redwood, whose height and strength made the remark perfectly true. 'And we get on so much faster thus.'

'But they will see us from the castle. There are lights. There are people still watching ——'

'Aye, I had not thought of that;' he drew up, and paused to consider. 'How are you to get in? Do they know — does anyone know you are out? How did you get out?'

'By the little side-door — Ailsie's door; Ailsie knows. She — oh, Mr. Redwood, let me go — let me go in alone,' unlocking her hands; 'if Ailsie were to see anyone with me, most of all if she were to see you ——'

Redwood stooped his head lower. 'Tell me,' he said significantly, 'does she — the nurse — *know?*'

'Yes.' Penelope wept a little, then proceeded. 'We never spoke of it. We — but I had to tell her at last. When I came out to-night I had to tell her, for I could not have left the castle without her help. She is waiting for me. It was the only thing I could do ——'

'I understand. Well,' he set her down gently. 'Try if you

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have the strength. It is but a few yards; you might manage it, perhaps,' for they were on the rustic bridge below the lawn. 'How do you feel? Shall I take away my arm?'

The next thing Penelope knew, she was lying on the couch within Ailsie's little parlour, voices were speaking softly to each other over her head, and there was a bright light in her eyes.

CHAPTER XLVII.

L'HONNEUR DU NOM.

'SHE will do now,' said Redwood, rising from his kneeling posture. 'Thank you, nurse, I don't think she will need any more of that at present. By-and-by, perhaps, but not now. Help me to lay her down more comfortably. There; we will let her lie still for a few minutes,' and he stood up and looked around.

He knew the place; Ailsie's own quiet little retreat. He had been graciously made welcome there on more than one occasion of late.

On this night a light had been placed in the window, and the same had streamed through the little side-door indicated by Penelope, so that in approaching thither he had been prepared to find it ajar. All the rest of the grey pile was shrouded in darkness, and not a glimmer marked even the casement of the death-chamber. The nurse had been forced to abandon her watch, and to none durst she confess as much, or entrust it in her stead.

Redwood, bearing his helpless burden, had thus effected his entrance to the castle unobserved by all but Mrs. Alison, who seemed almost beyond the reach of surprise or dismay, and he had postponed explanations until by their united efforts he and Ailsie had succeeded in restoring Penelope to animation. He felt, however, that the time for these had now come.

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He walked to the fireplace; it was one mass of glowing red-hot coals.

'A good time and a good place,' muttered he to himself, thinking of the blood-stained packet which Penelope had been so feverishly anxious to possess, and to obtain which she had dared so much, — and he put his hand in his breast pocket.

The hateful thing was there; it bulged out.

It had given him a pang, after lifting his precious burden in his arms, to feel when too late that he had laid her just over the place where it was, and where she might, if she thought of doing so, feel it. He would be glad to rid himself of such a possession; and it might — yes, it might satisfy Penelope's still dim and confused apprehensions more fully, were she to see it destroyed with her own eyes.

'Maister Redwood,' said a trembling voice behind, 'if you please, sir, to tak' a glass of wine? It is — what his lordship drinks. I thocht Miss Penelope might need it.'

Redwood turned round. He did not want wine; he loathed the thought of it; but there was something in the suppressed voice, in the stern self-control of the rigid figure, in the dry eyes, and most of all in the pathetic attempt at hospitality — he hastily poured himself out a glass full.

'I fear, sir, you have had a hard day of it. We that are in trouble suld na forget the requirements of others. If there were onythin' I could get ye? 'Deed it's no that late, an though Hyslop's to his bed ——'

'No, thank you; no, thank you. Nothing more.'

'Tak' a seat, sir, ye're standing a' the time. An ye hae been up and doun the countryside doin' oor wark — tak' a seat,' proffering one with her own hand.

'Pray don't, Mrs. Alison;' Redwood moved uneasily. How should he obtain the necessary opening?

'I ken ye hae been on oor ain errands;' the speaker wiped her dry lips to conceal their quivering. He interrupted her abruptly.

'You would like to know what my last errand has been, and I am anxious to inform you. Shall it be now — at once?'

'As ye please, sir.' Ah me! how the old face worked!

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'Trouble comes whaur the Lord sends it, and sair, sair is the trouble that has befaun this hoose the day! But, sir,' the wrinkled hand twitched restlessly up and down, 'Sir — Mr. Redwood — ye ken there's waur than sorrow; an' gif it suld please Him to spare the auld family — the auld bluid — frae *disgrace*, ——'

'It shall be saved,' said Redwood, laying his hand upon her shoulder. 'No finger shall point at her who is gone. No foul tongue shall be let loose by the terrible events of this day. She is dead, — but she shall rest quiet in her grave. If —' and he glanced towards the couch whereon Penelope lay panting with large eyes, and a damp, dewy brow, 'if I have permission, I will give you ample proof of my ability to fulfil this promise. Before I do so, however, we ought to make sure of one thing,' and he stepped to the door, and carefully drew the bolt; 'we are not likely to be disturbed, but still ——'

'Let me steek[1] the outer door, sir, first. We're no likely, as you say, — but folks aye do what's no likely; and seein' lichts burnin', they micht come ben,' and she passed outside.

Redwood seized the opportunity, and was by the sofa in an instant.

'You are sure she knows all? We shall be making no mistake in letting her share our secret.'

'She knows,' said Penelope, with a deep sigh. 'Oh yes, she knows.'

'From the first?'

'I — think so. What are you — going to do — Mr. Redwood?' faltering.

For answer he drew her gently to an upright position and placed a cushion at her back. 'Watch,' he whispered, and turned again to the fireplace. Ailsie had entered ere he finished the arrangement.

'I believe,' said Redwood, turning to her, and resolved upon emulating the fixed composure of her demeanour, though he could scarcely prevent a slight tremour of the voice, 'I believe we all know what we have to fear. There had been a foolish episode' — he paused; then resumed hurriedly, 'we need not allude to it. You, nurse, know what it was.'

[1] Fasten.

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'Na, Maister Redwood.'

On a sudden Ailsie set her face like a flint, a suspicion hitherto unfelt having entered her breast. Was she to be interrogated? Would they attempt to draw more out of her than they already knew? Who were they — these strangers — to pry into the secrets of the Carnousties? Anyhow she would admit nothing, and communicate nothing. 'Na, Maister Redwood; it's no me that kenned. Tell me what ye will; but me, I kenned naethin',' she muttered, 'naething' at a'.'

'Indeed?' said he, surprised, 'but I thought, I imagined ——' He looked towards Penelope, wondering if he had gone too far.

'Ailsie, surely you said you knew,' murmured she wearily.

Ailsie shook her head.

'Do you not recollect,' urged Penelope with a gesture half-imploring, half-impatient, 'how when I came downstairs to-night, and told you I must go up there — to that dreadful place — you said you knew what I had need to go for?'

'Said I yon?' The old woman affected to consider. 'Aweel, I micht. But the Lord forgie me if I said *she* tell't me, for ne'er a whisht[1] had I frae her.'

'Oh no, dear Ailsie, *that* I knew; but I supposed that you, like me, had found it out for yourself.'

'Did I? I kenna. I'm no sayin'.' Still the withered hand worked ceaselessly up and down, while Redwood bit his lip in perplexity; for without more to go upon than this, how was he to proceed?

But this deadlock on the part of the two others was Penelope's restoration to life and activity of mind. Had no more been required of her, she might have remained passive, as in a dream. The present dilemma roused her faculties afresh.

'Mr. Redwood need not be afraid,' she said bravely; 'he may say anything and do anything for our dear Mina's sake before us two. And, Mr. Redwood,' inspired by the courage of the moment, and fearful of its again escaping, 'will you just tell me one thing first? How did *you* know where to go, and what to look for to-night?'

[1] Whisper.

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'She told me,' said Redwood, looking down. 'She lived only just long enough to confide to me her sad story. She was perfectly conscious, and, though fast sinking, could speak intelligibly.'

Both his hearers held their breath to listen.

'Kenned she by whae's hand she fell?' whispered the nurse at last. Her parched lips could scarcely articulate the question.

'She did. She knew. And she forgave. She pronounced his name — Torquil Macalister — and, whilst she owned that he was her murderer, she strove to excuse his vile deed. She said it was a case of——'

'What?' cried they in a breath. 'What?'

'Love and jealousy,' said Redwood, not looking at them. 'She frankly avowed that this villain had dared to lift his eyes to her, and she had permitted him. She also spoke of you,' he added, turning to Penelope, 'and kindly — with great affection and gratitude. I will tell you all another time. She left a message for you.'

A deep flush overspread Penelope's cheek at the words; she could divine the import of such a message at such a moment.

'And she tell 't you a'?' exclaimed Ailsie with a sort of shuddering gasp. 'Aweel, maybe it's for the best. Maister Redwood, sir, ye'll bear nae grudge——'

She caught a warning glance from Penelope.

'I mean — ahem! — I'm no thinkin' what I say. Ye'll think nae ill o' the puir misguided bairn. She's had to dree her weird — wae's me! — to dree her weird; an it's a' ower noo — ower for evermair . . . but, eh, that she suld hae forgi'en him!' and the tears which had been restrained till now flowed over her aged cheeks at the thought.

'I gathered that this unhappy business had been going on for some time past,' said Redwood, taking refuge in a formal mode of expression, 'so that directly I had time to think, I came at once to the conclusion that the fellow would in all probability have about him some very — very unfortunate possessions. I was actually pondering this over, and wondering what would be the result should he be arrested with them on his person, (when, of course, they would have been produced

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in court), when I heard that shot upon the moor! Had the night not been so absolutely clear and fine I might never have observed it, and certainly should never have found the place whence it proceeded; but, as it happened, the moon was shining full upon that little knoll, and I recollected our once going there together,' he turned with a softened accent towards Penelope, whose eyes, fixed upon him, sank at this, 'and your saying in jest that if anything ever took place on the island, it was invariably upon that spot. I had been puzzled what you could mean — or whether you meant anything.' He paused.

'I did; but I — I cannot tell you.' She recalled a bitter gibe she had dealt on one of her bad days — a day when Mina had been unusually gay and, to all appearance, triumphing in her new lover — and which it gave her now a pang to think of.

'By starting off at once,' proceeded Redwood in the matter-of-fact narrative tone he had adopted, 'I knew I should be beforehand with the Fiscal's people, who, even if they had noticed anything, would wait till daylight to make their investigations; so I did not delay a moment, and was at the knoll, and had completed my search before I was disturbed. You know the rest,' to Penelope, 'and now' — he slowly drew forth the crumpled and discoloured packet from his breast pocket; Ailsie uttered a faint ejaculation, but Penelope, with thirsty eyes, sat up and watched in silence — 'it might be as well to undo it, to make sure there is nothing we have no right to,' muttered Redwood to himself, and he untied the knotted handkerchief.

A small bundle of letters — principally scraps, all torn and shattered — fell out. There was a piece of blue and silver ribbon — (Penelope had once admired the ribbon in poor Mina's soft flaxen hair) — and a large cabinet photograph torn almost in half, and burnt at the edges. The life-blood of the wretched man dyed every page. He had placed the muzzle of his gun so as to pierce through all.

Not a word was spoken. The little clock upon the mantelpiece ticked solemnly on, its hands pointing to the small hours of the morning.

Redwood looked from one to another as demanding their

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attention, then stepped to the fireplace, placed upon the glowing mass the collected fragments, and in an instant they were in a flame.

'This, too,' whispered Penelope at his elbow, and she held towards him what he full well guessed to be the counterpart of the fatal packet. Without looking at her, he laid it where the other had been, and the flames devoured as before.

There was still the brooch, but she put it back into her bosom; it could easily be disposed of, dropped in some lonely depth of water; in itself it revealed nothing. She alone knew to whom it had belonged, and by whom given.

A sigh of relief burst from her lips, and she sank back upon the little couch with strength almost exhausted. Redwood, leaning against the mantelpiece, thoughtfully, his back towards her, seemed to have forgotten for an instant where he was.

On a sudden the little clock rang out two shrill notes, and he started from his reverie.

'It is very late,' he said quickly. 'I ought not to keep you longer, but——' then he walked across the room and took the old nurse by the hand. 'Will you do me a favour?' he said. 'Leave us for a few moments? I will not ask longer, I assure you; but before we part to-night——,' Ailsie passed into the inner room and shut the door.

A mist swam before Penelope's eyes. She only knew that Redwood was kneeling by her side, his voice in her ear, his hand on hers. 'I was very presumptuous,' he murmured, 'and may have assumed too much up there on the hillside. Time pressed, and I was forced to be imperious; to take for granted anything that would warrant — but now I want my answer. Dear — give it me. You know what it is I ask of you. One word — one little word — and I could trust you for time and eternity — but give me that word. Put your hand in mine' — he loosed it and put it away from him — 'and tell me you will be true?'

'True?' But then Penelope faintly smiled. She remembered.

The moment before she had thought she could not speak, but now she thought 'I *will* speak;' and drew a long shivering breath, and her lips parted.

'Poor child, it is cruel to ask you——'

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'Ask me — anything.'

'Nay, then I will ask nothing,' said Redwood, his heart bounding. 'All's said in that, dearest — dearest. The compact's sealed. One kiss, and I will go. You have already had far too much to bear to-night.' Again his head bent low to hers, and in another few minutes he laid her gently down upon the pillow, and rose and went to the door. Ailsie came out at his summons.

'My dear, kind friend,' said Redwood, 'here is one over whom you must watch very carefully. She is too young to have had such a strain put upon her as she has been through in these last hours. Think what she has had to see and to do to-day! Some day I hope — I trust — happiness may come to her once more; but she will never, I fear, lose this one terrible memory; and *you* know how much of it has been brought upon herself by her own noble, courageous undertaking. She is going to be my wife,' — he paused, and in spite of himself his eyes lit up at the words; 'we have been united in this sorrowful scene; give us your good wishes that we may live to blot it out with happier ones.' He wrung her hand, unwilling further to obtrude his own anticipations at such a time.

But Ailsie had schooled herself for this. 'Noo that there's nane to hinner,' she murmured as though to herself, 'noo that I ken a', and its ower, ower for evermair,' — then aloud, with solemn emphasis, 'The Lord bless ye and keep ye, the Lord mak' His face to shine upon ye, an' gie ye peace! Eh! ma bairns, ma bairns! Eh! that this day suld ha' come to the prood, prood hoose o' Carnoustie!' Sobs choked further utterance.

To give her a moment for recovery, Redwood turned to bid Penelope farewell.

'There is one thing more,' he whispered. 'It shall be for you to say when this is to be made known. It would be cruel to make any announcement at present ——'

'Oh! don't, don't.' She perceived in a moment.

'I will not. Not a word. You understand, nurse,' looking round. 'Not a word of this to Lord and Lady Carnoustie. Their sorrow must be respected' — all knew what he meant — 'and till I have the right to take this dear hand,' continued Redwood,

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laying on it his own, 'from the only person who can claim the honour to give it me, I will forego my privileges. You shall have nothing to fear from my imprudence, darling;' in a whisper, 'You have taught me to think of others; you shall see how I have learned the lesson.'

She bowed her head in silence. No voice broke that silence, only the sound of broken-hearted weeping was audible in the background.

Redwood knelt down. How long he knelt there, holding in his arms the beloved, unresisting form so newly his own, nor he nor she knew. Such moments are not to be counted.

But at length, with a sigh, and one long last embrace, he rose, for the time to part had come, and go he must. Ailsie was nowhere to be seen; so, without daring to trust his resolution further, he undid the doors, and softly closed them behind him; his step was heard on the gravel outside; in another few minutes it died away, and all was still.

The day was over — over at last.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

CONCLUSION.

WEEKS passed, and every day up the turret staircase which led to Penelope's room there came the tramp of the doctor's heavy feet.

Penelope was very ill.

It would have been almost against nature if she had not been so. Day followed night, and night followed day; and still the tender young life hung in the balance, baffling every care and every modern resource.

A learned physician was summoned from Edinburgh at the instance of Dr. McWhinnock; but he could only confirm that worthy's own treatment, and opinion that time alone could work

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a perfect cure. He was able, however, to hold out hopes and quiet the worst apprehensions.

With perfect rest, and the most absolute freedom from every species of excitement, the patient stood a good chance of ultimate recovery. More he could not say. She had youth in her favour — youth and, as he understood, previous health and good habits — too much value could not be laid upon these in a case of the kind; but it was impossible to speak with absolute decision, and poor Lord Carnoustie, who had accompanied the black-coated authority to the door, hanging on his lips as though he were a very messenger from Heaven, went back to the dining-room with a dull pain at his heart; and, refusing to communicate even the little he knew, pushed aside everything offered him, and finally burst into a scolding fit of such unexampled and uncalled-for ferocity that Louisa wept, and Joanna fled before it.

Where was Lady Carnoustie? In her presence no such scene would ever have been enacted.

Alas! Lady Carnoustie would never again check with her frown either husband or child.

Lady Carnoustie was a quiet, pleasant, smiling old woman now, not very sure who all the kind people were who ministered to her wants so thoughtfully; not at all concerned about the manner in which one would vanish as another appeared, one come in at the door as the other went out; and only a little surprised now and then that her daughter Mina did not take her turn with the rest, and sit in the armchair by the bedside for a chat.

When told that Mina was not in the house she was quite satisfied. It was so good for dear little Mina to be out-of-doors.

Would she send her love to Penelope? Oh yes, dear Penelope — but who, who was Penelope?

Lady Carnoustie had had a stroke of paralysis, and though she might ultimately regain a portion of health and intelligence, it was quite understood that memory was gone, and that the past with her must now be for ever a blank.

It was best so; even in the midst of their distress the afflicted

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family could tell each other it was best so; for they now knew all, and it was this knowledge and not the shock of Mina's awful death which had bereft Mina's mother of her senses.

But how came it that the secret which Penelope had risked so much to conceal, and of which she and Redwood believed all evidence destroyed, had transpired?

Were not they and Ailsie alone cognisant of its existence? And had not every scrap and fragment of writing, every illicit treasure and love-token, been burnt to ashes?

They thought so, and with a wearied spirit in a measure at peace, Penelope had laid herself down upon her bed at last, feeling that, horrible as had been the double crime committed, some of its horrors at least had been spared coming to the light, through her and her lover's means; but there is an old saying, 'A chain is only as strong as its weakest link,' and one weak link in the present chain of evidence had been overlooked. Penelope had forgotten the letter at the village post-office.

Mercifully, so did others until the day after the funeral.

Up to that date Lord and Lady Carnoustie, albeit overwhelmed with sorrow, were yet able to bear their parts in the mournful duties of the occasion -- the grief-stricken mother even surprising those about her by her resolute efforts after self-control and submission to the will of Heaven. 'My poor wife bears up wonderfully!' had been again and again on Lord Carnoustie's lips; and he had conceived a respect for her, and a tenderness towards her during those few days which he was thankful afterwards to be able to look back upon.

For the grave had scarcely closed, the flowers were yet fresh upon its surface, when a messenger was sent to Ailsie's room with an imperative summons at which the old woman's heart gave a sudden bound. She could not recollect ever before being thus sent for.

Instinctively she divined that this had nothing to do with Penelope; for though she was nursing Penelope — taking precaution that no ears but her own should listen to the wandering babble which ceaselessly issued from the parched lips — all inquiries, though as solicitous as could have been desired on the part of her master and mistress, had been made without the

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need for a personal interview. No, it was not on Penelope's account that Lady Carnoustie desired her attendance now.

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, her shrewd penetration divined the worst, directly she opened the door of the room in which Lady Carnoustie awaited her. Lady Carnoustie was standing. On the hearthrug in front of her stood her husband. Neither daughter was present.

'They've fun' it oot,' whispered the faithful servant to herself, every limb shaking. 'Gude help them! they've fun' it oot!'

Then she closed the door carefully, and walked close up to the other two. In a short time they had learned all she had to tell — all at least that had reference to the tragedy of their child's life and death.

It is not our purpose to dwell upon the emotions which such a revelation induced; nor, indeed, would it be possible in mere words to depict the amazement, the incredulity, the agony of consternation and bewilderment which, ranged on one side, were confronted by one speechless, incontrovertible witness on the other. A common, vulgar love letter — such a love letter as might indeed harmlessly have been indited to a village beauty by her illiterate swain, but which, when addressed to their own daughter, to the loved one for whose untimely end they were in the first anguish of sorrow — and penned, moreover, by the hand which had ruthlessly destroyed her — was horrible beyond the power of speech to express — this was the weapon against which resistance and defence were alike useless.

To explain it, in the last wild hope that it might admit of explanation, Ailsie had been summoned; and what would not she have given to have been able to protest that the confident strain of love requited was but the outpouring of a mind diseased; that Mina had never known of the madman's delusion, but had yielded up her life its innocent victim?

She could not say this. Perhaps, who knows, she might; — she would have said much, said almost anything on behalf of the old race whose honour, whose very life-blood was esteemed her own — but of what avail were falsehood? A simple inquiry at the village post-office would blow her testimony to the winds. Recollecting the packets destroyed by Redwood and Penelope,

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she could not doubt that this clandestine missive was only one of many — many both received and answered; and realising that the worst had come, she stood upright and told all, concluding with these words: 'My lord, an' my leddy, listen to me. Mebbe it's no for me to speak — it's no for the likes o' me to cast up aught that's come an' gane to the likes o' you — but it's the Lord's truth ye hae heard this day; and may the Lord Himsel' help ye baith to bear it! Ask me what mair ye will; I'm here to answer. I did what I could, an' there's them wha did what I couldna — but there was nane could save her, sin' yersels had made her what she was. She micht hae been a gaid bairn, the joy o' yer hearts, the croon o' yer auld age — she micht hae been a mither hersel', wi' a hame and a husband o' her ain — she micht hae been alive an' weel this day, gif she had been let to be what the Lord made her, an' let to live the life He made her for. . .' A pause. . . . 'Ye best ken wha turned her frae it. Wha quenched a' the light in her bit breast as a lassie; wha garred her be silent when she wad fain hae spoken oot, — garred her be guid, when she was no guid, — garred her mak' believe she was content, when her heart was angered and sore. She was to ken naethin', think o' naethin', care for naethin' but what ye thocht fit. She was to tak' up wi' naebody, — ne'er came ane to the hoose o' her ain rank ——'

'There at least you are wrong,' broke in Lord Carnoustie in a loud, hoarse voice. 'Mr. Redwood ——'

'Redwood?' Ailsie laughed a bitter laugh. 'Redwood? Na! She was past Redwood afore he came. The iron had entered into her saul; and she was fain to fling hersel' awa, to be revenged, if for naethin' mair. Aye, it was revenge — it mun hae been revenge,' she muttered to herself. 'A Carnoustie could stoop to revenge, but no to love.'

Lord Carnoustie seized her by the arm and shook it. 'What more do you know, woman? Speak, in God's name, and hide nothing; do you not see that she,' pointing to a motionless figure sitting stiffly upright with fixed, wide-open eyes, 'that she ——' The speaker's accents died away.

Both were aware of a terrible new turn of events, and both alike sprang forward; — but too late.

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There was one loud bursting sigh, one blind involuntary movement, and Lady Carnoustie lay stretched upon the floor.

She never recovered the full use of her reason; never reverted to the above scene, nor seemed to retain any recollection of it; though, after a period of time, a certain amount of restoration was otherwise effected in her health.

It was felt, as we have said, that the stroke which deprived her of memory, and limited her intelligence, was even in its intensity a merciful one.

It was now very reasonably Lord Carnoustie's chief anxiety to learn whether the mystery of his daughter's death had been unriddled by the world at large; and he was comforted more than he would have dared avouch, by finding — or fancying — as time passed, that nobody knew anything. This was so much better than what he at first anticipated, that being as we know, a man of dull sensibility, he resumed his usual jog-trot life ere long; but no one ever heard him mention the name of his dead child, whilst it was observed that with the snows of winter snow seemed also to descend upon the bereaved old baron's head. Nor was he ever again quite so sturdily upright in his bearing, nor faced he the world so boldly as he had been wont to do. Taking Ailsie's words more deeply to heart than he had ever taken anything in his life before, he resolved that, now he was left to judge and act for himself, he would give his two remaining daughters his full confidence, and strive, however late in the day, to retrieve the errors of their earlier education. 'They were but poor feckless creatures to begin with,' he muttered; 'but perhaps Ailsie was right. *She* would never have tolerated their being anything else.' There was but one 'She' for him thenceforth.

With Lady Carnoustie safely smiling in her bedroom, and with the old nurse's denunciations ringing in his ears, he felt he must do what in him lay for Louisa and Joanna now.

And by-and-by a certain hush crept over the spot where such tragic events had rent the air, and the two quiet sick rooms became centres of home attraction; each a little world in itself.

Penelope began to recover, and Penelope's well-being was the leading thought of the household.

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Presently she took note of who spoke to her and ministered to her. She asked what had become of Marie?

Now, Marie had protested weeks before betwixt hysterics and temper, that she should not stay a day longer than she could help in such a dreadful place, and accordingly she had been gladly despatched on the first opportunity; and it was Katie Cameron — clever, cheery little Katie from Glenmore — who had been sent over by the Misses Soutter to assist Ailsie in her nursing. Penelope had grown quite accustomed to the sight of Katie's face and figure going about, before it ever occurred to her to ask what Katie was doing there?

The next step was a vague interest in her food, and then at last the invalid began to 'take hold.'

'She was just aboot *dummocked* with it all, and that's the truth,' quoth Dr. McWhinnock, in diagnosing the case. 'But she's pu'd through — she's pu'd through, and she'll be none the worse — not a bawbee the worse — once we get up her strength again. Let her lie still a bit, and don't hurry her. I've no opeenion of hurry. "Hurry no man's cattle," says the proverb, and troth! there's a deal of sense in thae proverbs.'

Accordingly Penelope lay still, and life came back to her.

One day she beckoned the old nurse to her bedside, and pointed to the window-blinds, both of which were drawn down, as they had been for many days. It was a mild November day; a pearly mist hung over the ocean, and not a ripple stirred its glassy surface. The warm season had kept the fuchsias still in luxuriant bloom, while myrtle-blossoms were out upon the south wall of the garden, and verbena branches sprawled all over the path.

'I had no idea autumn was like this in Scotland,' murmured Penelope. 'Myrtle-blossoms in November!' holding up a bunch which Louisa had left with her. 'I think I should like to look out to-day. Draw up the blind and let in the sunlight, Ailsie dear; I know the sun is shining outside.'

But when Ailsie advanced towards the window whence she thought less glare would fall upon the invalid's weakened eyeballs, Penelope's voice grew quite loud and strong in protest.

'Not that blind — not that one.' She waved her hand imperatively. 'I won't look out there — not there. Let me look

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upon the sea,' pointing to the nearest casement, whence a view of the bay could be obtained from where she lay.

The old woman did as she was bid without a word. After a moment's reflection, she remembered that the other side of the little turret was that which overlooked the moor, — and then she knew that Penelope's wandering senses were returning.

A little longer and Penelope asked to sit up within the small windowed recess and watch the world below, and thenceforward spent a part of every day there.

On one occasion, and one only, she and Ailsie reverted to the past. Ailsie found her in tears, and gently remonstrated in nursely parlance; but Penelope, looking round carefully to be sure they were alone, bade the old woman sit down beside her for a few minutes.

'You see, Ailsie,' she said, 'I cannot forget that if I had done what I ought, all of this might — I don't say it would — but it *might* have been prevented. If I had refused to keep poor Mina's secret, and insisted on her telling her father or mother ——'

'She wadna hae dune it,' said Ailsie sadly. 'No if ye had gaen upo' your knees to her, she was that feared, puir, puir thing! Think ye no if words could hae prevailed, mine wad hae been wantin'?'

'But you said you did not know.'

'Nae mair I did ken to him — to Redwood. Nae mair I did ken — what could be ca'd kennin'. For nae word nor whisht let she fa', and aye turned aside my cautions, an aye laucht at me; but ho! fine I kenned for a' that. Maybe, no *a'* that went on, but eneugh — waes me! eneugh. I wadna tak' ower muckle blame to yersel', my dawtie,' patting the shoulder of her charge tenderly. 'Ye was nae that sair wrang; ye did your best ——'

'Perhaps I could not have made her confess, but at least I need not have hurried her into further deceit. I mean,' said Penelope, faltering, 'about Mr. Redwood.'

A quavering shadow of a smile flickered across Ailsie's lips.

'And a' the time Redwood was for yersel'!' she said.

'But I did not know it; I had no idea of it,' eagerly.

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'Remember, no one is to be told about that for a long, long time yet, Ailsie; you *will* remember, won't you? It would hurt them dreadfully ——'

'I'll no tell. Dinna be feared.'

'Then there was another thing,' proceeded Penelope, blushing a little. 'You know what Tosh said on that day the Ainslies arrived?'

'Aye; I mind.'

'What could he have meant?'

'Miss Penelope, gif ye kenned Tosh as I do, ye wad hae kenned by this, that whiles he means jist naethin' ava! Whiles he's sensible, and he's aye trusty, — but, 'deed a' the time it's jist Tosh; and though I made as though I believed him thon day, i' my heart I thocht naethin' o't.'

'He must have heard *something?*'

'He micht, or he micht no.'

'I shall learn some day,' said Penelope softly to herself. And meantime she let the subject drop.

She wanted next to know if her father had been told how ill she was.

He had. It had been deemed advisable to inform him after the Edinburgh physician had given his verdict, since no one could foresee what turn the fever might take. Also Dr. McWhinnock was sure that as soon as his patient could move she must be got away from the place. Lord Carnoustie thought that very likely Mr. East would sail for England immediately on receipt of his letter. Lord Carnoustie looked grave as he thus spoke. He did not like the idea of Mr. East's returning to claim his daughter. He did not like at all the idea of being without Penelope.

Every day he now found his way up the turret stair. It was good for the invalid, he averred, to have some one to talk to, and he and she had plenty to talk about. He had always found Penelope took an interest in his affairs, and liked to have full accounts of each day's sport after the shooting began; wherefore it did not in the least surprise him to find that nothing now entertained her so well. He was always saying to Redwood, who had fallen into the way of either joining him on

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his moor or getting him on to the Inverashet moor, that such and such an exciting bit of luck or evidence of canine intelligence would 'do to tell Penelope.' Redwood, sympathising, would contribute his share towards the items, and occasionally rather more than his share.

He was very cautious, — but he had an easy person to deal with. It was nothing in Lord Carnoustie's eyes for his companion to send a tuft of white heather from the heights to please a poor girl who was confined to her room in the glorious autumn weather.

When he produced a new volume of illustrations, and suggested to Miss Louisa that it might amuse an invalid who was not able to pass the time with reading, no one suspected that he had not got it down from town for his own use. When he brought anything, or when he came over with nothing, or whatever he did, or whatever he left undone, it was all one; Redwood could not go wrong in the eyes of the hapless Carnoustie family now. They fancied their sorrow shared by him (for it had been no part of Ailsie's business to enlighten anyone on that point), and though we who are behind the scenes know that it was not so to the extent imagined, still it is but just to state that he had a very real respect and regard for the family, and felt more at home and content in their family circle than he did anywhere else, or truth to tell, than anyone else had ever done before his day.

How much of this may have been due to a dear unacknowledged cause it boots not here to inquire. Penelope, it is true, was in the castle, if unseen; is it unfair to suggest that her presence under its roof cast a dim invisible halo over everything connected with it?

Our readers will have guessed that long before this the former invalid had vanished. Captain Ainslie had indeed taken his departure the very day after the tragedy, his dislocated joint having it is to be supposed, cured itself miraculously in the night, for it is noteworthy that he walked down to the pier with only the assistance of an arm to lean upon; and that albeit he found the disabled limb a little stiff to work, he experienced no ill effects from using it so suddenly.

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'Couldn't stay another day, you know; by Jove I couldn't; neither for their sakes nor for my own,' averred little Bob, emphatically. 'Too awful, you know! Poor things! Fact is, it was a funereal place at the best of times; and, though they were awfully kind to me and all that, I could not have stopped on, to save my life; I really couldn't, you know. Ill or well, I had to make a bolt for it.'

'Aye, if you had had poor little Ainslie nowadays to sing to you, and play your game with, it would have been something,' observed Lord Carnoustie, who naturally saw the matter from the other point of view. 'But he was a well-behaved little creature, and took himself off immediately he felt he was in the way. I shall always think kindly of the creature,' ruminating. 'It was such a comedy of a creature.'

'And how about your other comedy of a creature, uncle Carnoustie? Where has Tosh been all this time? And what has he been about?'

'Tosh? I have not heard or seen anything of him since —— stop, "Talk of the devil" — Hoots! the girls mustn't hear me say that! But it's queer, isn't it? There he is; there's Tosh at this very minute,' pointing with his finger, 'coming up the avenue! There he comes, poor fellow, hurpling along! I must go down and speak to him presently.' Then after a minute, 'What on earth is that hanging down behind his back?' murmured Lord Carnoustie to himself. 'A long black streamer, down to the end of his coat tails. What is that for? And look, Penelope, it is dangling from his Tam-o'-Shanter. He has tied it round his red "Tammy!" What can the idea of that be?'

What indeed? One glance informed the quicker-eyed Penelope; she perceived that Tosh esteeming himself one of the family, had resolved on sharing their mourning, and in order to do so adequately had wound an enormous crape band round his worsted 'Tammy,' tied a huge bow behind, and let it stream behind him as far as it would go.

''Deed, an' I think it's raal dacent!' exclaimed he proudly, in reply to an ejaculation from Ailsie, who opened her little side door to him; 'it was my mither's, puir weedy[1] wumman; it was

[1] Widow.

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upo' her weedy's bannet, an' I was hainin (saving) it for Carnoustie, — but mebbe it will sair him tae,' he added, taking it off and regarding it fondly. 'Is Carnoustie aboot? He wad be fain to see me wi' sic gran' murrnins.'

Fain, indeed! No sight in the world would have achieved what the poor idiot's inimitable 'murrnins' did for his patron. Lord Carnoustie took one look at Penelope — at Penelope, crimson — then the corners of his mouth slowly relaxed, and the next minute — but we will not pry into the next minute.

'But never let on about this, Penelope — never.' Lord Carnoustie at length wiped his eyes, and got himself out of his chair. '*She* would never have forgiven me, poor woman, could she have known I had been laughing. We must get him to take off that thing somehow, and try to forget it — but, oh dear! oh dear!'

At length the day came when Penelope could go downstairs.

Perhaps she could have gone before she did; perhaps she shrank a little from a meeting which must take place, and which she scarcely knew how to face — but, at any rate, she was well; she was fairly strong; and she was just able to seat herself in the corner of poor Lady Carnoustie's own sofa, tenderly offered by the tearful Louisa and Joanna, who felt nothing could be too good, and that dear mamma would herself have wished it could she have been able to understand, — Penelope, we say, had only just got fairly ensconced with all the paraphernalia of invalidism to support her, before the sportsmen were sighted in the avenue.

'It will be rather trying seeing Mr. Redwood,' whispered Louisa — Louisa had never been noted for tact — 'but we thought you would be glad to get it over. So we told papa to be sure to bring him in to-day.'

Penelope almost wished this had been kept back. Uncertainty would have been something, but now she was shaking and shivering all over; and when Joanna from the window announced, 'Here are papa and Mr. Redwood at the door,' and when Louisa considerately added, 'I know you must be a little nervous, dear Penelope,' and when finally the door opened, and Lord Carnoustie's voice was heard speaking to some one behind, and

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that 'some one' came in tall and broad behind him, and was felt rather than heard greeting the nearer ladies, and then was coming — coming up to her — poor Penelope felt as if the room were spinning round, and herself the centre of all eyes.

Indeed, she looked so pale, and slight, and trembling, that Redwood scarce knew how to let go the hand he took in his. He had, to be sure, an excuse for a moment's lingering. 'I hope you feel a little better now?' he could be allowed to inquire, and pause for a response.

And then the elder Miss Carnoustie, greatly pluming herself on her discretion, took up the subject and assured him that 'dear Penelope' was very much better, and only looked a little less well to-day than usual because of the excitement of coming downstairs, and seeing people. It was always rather an era in an invalid's recovery that first coming downstairs.

Redwood listened with profound attention, glancing every now and then at the little face with its eyes cast down, and wondering how soon he should be able to do more.

But Louisa, for her, was quite on the alert. 'Now we will all go off to the other side of the room, and have our tea there,' she cried; 'and, dear Penelope, you will just stay here, and Mr. Redwood will bring you yours.'

('That's better,' thought he.)

'And put a little table before you, and you can have it comfortably,' subjoined Louisa, departing.

Thus on each of his journeys Redwood had a moment wherein to say or to look something. It was not much; but he was satisfied, as far as it went. Then, at last, he thought he might venture a step further. The Misses Soutter came in, and were cordially welcomed at the tea-table. 'My good angels!' cried Redwood to himself; 'was there ever a call more opportune?' And without more ado he calmly seated himself on the sofa by Penelope's side.

'I hear your father is expected home,' he said, softly. 'Soon?'

'I am expecting a letter to-day.'

'And you will join him in the south as soon as you are able to travel, Lord Carnoustie tells me.'

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'I shall be able as soon as he can have me.'

'You don't look very strong yet — dear,' the last word slipped out under his breath. In a moment the pale cheek beside him was overspread with colour; it seemed such a long, long time since that never-to-be-forgotten night that Redwood — Redwood, whose image had been before Penelope's eyes, whose words and looks and tones had fed every hour of consciousness with throbbing hopes and memories — seemed now, when once more in the flesh by her side, a stranger.

He leaned towards her, and stole the hand which lay temptingly near. 'I am not going to transgress. Don't be afraid,' he murmured. 'It is enough to see you, and be with you again. I' — but he had to draw himself upright hastily. Louisa was approaching, letter-bag in hand.

'One for you, Penelope. It looks like your father's hand, but it has no foreign stamp.'

It needed none. Mr. East had arrived in England. The next moment Penelope was exclaiming with a cry, 'Oh, he is come! He is come!' and the next she fell to sobbing like a child.

Redwood rose and withdrew himself.

'Nothing the matter, I hope,' cried the ladies at the far table, in a breath. 'No bad news?'

'Oh no; very good news, I should say. The best thing in the world for her. Mr. East is arrived, and she is a little overcome; but it is only from the momentary surprise.' Then he glanced backwards. 'She is better already. I think,' to Miss Louisa, 'if you were to go and talk to her?' — Louisa delightedly felt that she was quite the person to undertake the delicate task; and when she re-crossed the room she assured them all that dear Penelope was quite recovered, and very happy at the thought of seeing her father again. Mr. East had written desiring her to meet him in London as soon as possible, while knowing nothing of any particular reason for its being desirable she should do so. He had started for home before receiving the last letter from Carnoustie Castle.

'I thought he must have done so,' observed Redwood, curiously well up in the subject. 'He could hardly have had

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time to reach home from Jamaica, if he had only left it on receipt of your letter on the 16th of last month.'

They then discussed the matter at length.

Presently the Misses Soutter took their leave, and Redwood felt he ought to take his. But he could not go. He had become in a manner one of the Carnoustie family, and for once and away thought he would disobey the dictates of ceremony. 'Miss Carnoustie, are you in a mood to grant a petition?'

Miss Carnoustie was always in the mood — from him.

'I am so very lonely at Inverashet,' pleaded Redwood, 'and it is so very nice here;' looking round, 'may I — won't you ask me to stay on? Please do.'

'Oh, Mr. Redwood, I am so glad!' Lady Carnoustie would have fallen off her chair had she heard the fervent cordial tones, but the Lady Carnoustie of old was now even in Louisa's thoughts only a shadowy 'dear mamma,' whose shadow was invariably benignant. 'I hope you will say whenever you would like to stay on with us,' continued she enthusiastically. 'Papa, will you kindly ring the bell, and send to Inverashet for Mr. Redwood's portmanteau? There is an hour yet before the dressing gong sounds.'

'And we'll go for a turn in the garden, for it's as warm as summer,' appended Carnoustie, doing as he was told. 'It's just wonderfully warm for this time of year.'

'Would not a little air do your niece good?' suggested Redwood, aside to him. 'She looks as if a gentle turn in the air would ——'

'Be the very thing for her. Hey, Penelope, put on your hat and shoes, there's a good lassie; and come for a bit of a stroll with Redwood and me. We'll go by the garden door. You needn't take a step more than just the garden round, and I'll give you my arm.'

'And I'll fetch your things, dear.' Both Louisa and Joanna started forward. Everyone was ready to do anything for Penelope now. What had Penelope not done for them?

Louisa put on her cousin's cloak, Joanna fastened her overshoes, Lord Carnoustie himself with anxious awkwardness fumbled with her hat and gloves. Then the latter, as half frightened

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at his own temerity, and dreading to be prevented carrying it into effect by some unthought of intervention, seized the little hand and tucked it under his arm, and, almost ere Penelope knew what she was about, she was borne along into the soft, sweet dusk outside.

But Penelope could not but feel pleased to have come. They wandered about, she and her two stalwart protectors, inhaling the mystic scents of myriad blossoms, and marking the wild, straggling growth of the beautiful garden.

'A garden's a fine place,' said Carnoustie, meditatively. 'I'm fond of a garden. If it's good for nothing else, it's good to walk in.' He could not shoot, nor fish, nor farm among his flowery paths, but he could at least take the good of walking, pure and simple, among them. By-and-by it was: 'Hey, I'd forgotten I wanted to see Finlayson about the seed list. He's down in the plantation just now. Penelope,' disengaging her from his arm, 'just stop here for a minute with Mr. Redwood — give her your arm, Redwood — and I'll be back in five minutes.'

Redwood respectfully did as he was desired. After a few minutes it was, 'I may ask a few questions, may I? Only about yourself? Only to know how soon you think of going? And how you are to go? You cannot go alone.'

'Oh no; it is arranged; uncle Carnoustie is to escort me.'

'Lord Carnoustie? Oh!' said he, disappointed. 'I had meant — I had hoped — but perhaps I should not have been permitted?' looking at her with a wistful interrogating note in his voice.

'You know,' Penelope's reply faltered a little, 'you know what you promised?'

'You don't suppose I would go back from my promise, Penelope?' He put his hand on hers within his arm.

'But you know what would be thought?'

'Oh, I should have taken care! Our meeting should have been purely accidental. Still, perhaps it is best. I am going to be very careful, you need not fear. I have arranged to stay on at Inverashet for the winter shooting, — it is really very good I am told, only no one has ever had the patience to stay on for

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it, — and I shall only need to take an occasional run south to see my friends. One must be allowed to see one's friends occasionally, Penelope?' and he leaned over to smile into her face.

'You will be sure not to let them think — I mean they must not be able to — to ——'

'To infer anything? Certainly not. But I really must go to London very soon — within a few days — at least within a few days of your departure. It may be curious — but I *must* go. I have business, business that cannot be delayed, and that necessitates my calling upon Mr. East — at his office, — you cannot object to that?'

'Oh, with that,' said Penelope demurely, 'I have nothing to do.' And she could not help smiling back at him for the space of half a second; and a young under-gardener, who was raking near, said to himself, 'Oho!'

Then Lord Carnoustie came back, and said that he had been detained and was sorry to have been so long, and it was time for Penelope to go in; and as he remorselessly and unconsciously transferred her little hand back from Redwood's arm to his own, he presented her with a pale November rose he had found blowing on the wall, which she wore to brighten up her black frock in the evening.

In the evening they were all very quiet. Nobody ever did anything particular in the evenings at Carnoustie Castle, and now even the piano was not available. They were sitting here and there aimlessly after dinner, when Lord Carnoustie, after looking once or twice at his young invalid visitor, in whose cheek the pallor of illness was intensified by its contrast with her mourning robe, suddenly made a stupendous proposition.

'Penelope — ahem! — you're just sitting there with your hands before you. What was that game you used to play with Captain Ainslie? I daresay Mr. Redwood would play it with you? He used to play it with the Bob creature too.'

Redwood professed his readiness.

'It's just nonsense the fuss about cards as cards,' muttered the old gentleman into Louisa's ear, Louisa having looked at him for a moment. 'Even *she* got not to mind the sight of

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them with Ainslie; and why shouldn't Redwood do what Ainslie did? Get out the cards,' decisively.

'Perhaps if Mr. Redwood would place the screen round that little settee,' suggested Joanna, as Louisa obeyed the mandate, 'dear Penelope would not feel a draught; and here is the small table Captain Ainslie found so convenient for piquet.'

And Redwood and Penelope were started at piquet.

It must be owned that the way they played and scored was a novelty in the game. Redwood undertook the scoring. He was very exact and clear-headed at first, but as soon as onlookers had withdrawn, and no one was taking any particular notice of the play or the players, his declarations took something of this form:

'Tierce to the king. *Is any day fixed for you to go?* That's "good," is it? Or have you a higher? *Do you travel by Great Western?* No; stop; excuse me, but you can't count that. No, you don't,' holding back her hand with a smile. 'It is for me to play first. Oh, you have let me take the trick too! You are not attending closely enough to the game, I am afraid. I can't trust you to score with cards, I shall write down our respective numbers with a pencil and paper. You are only thirty-three, and I am a hundred and fifty-three. *What is your address in Portland Place?* Therefore I add your score to my own. And I add also the difference between us. That makes rather a big beating for this round. *And now give me his City address too, if you please?*'

Altogether it was rather a peculiar game of piquet.

The next day Penelope was to have her first drive, and with much state and many wrappings she was installed in the corner seat of the big barouche. How delightfully the soft, mild sea air blew in her face! How it wooed her cheek, and rested on her eyelids! Everything seemed peaceful, tender, caressing.

Louisa now occupied the corner hitherto dedicated to her mother; how soon, how strangely soon, and how easily was poor Lady Carnoustie's place being everywhere filled! The placid invalid kissed her hand from the window as the carriage rolled by, and asked her attendant who the ladies were? She was quite pleased to see the horses' harness flash and glitter in the sun.

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'You are enjoying your drive, Penelope, I think,' said Louisa, affectionately. 'What are we stopping for, Duncan?' demanded the speaker, a minute or two later. 'Anything wrong?'

'Mr. Redwood signalled us, my lady.' Duncan pointed to a figure on the foreground of the moor; and in a few minutes Redwood, with his gun on his shoulder and his dogs at his heels, appeared at the carriage door.

'I have been up on the ptarmigan heights,' he said, 'and I remembered that you,' addressing Penelope, 'thought you would like a ptarmigan's wing for your hat. Will you accept one?' producing a brace of the speckled grey birds, whose plumage was just beginning to change for the winter.

He looked so cheerful, so animated, so full of life and vigour altogether, that Penelope, smiling back, wondered a little whether the glad look of his eyes and the ring in his voice would not strike her companion as peculiar in her poor dead sister's supposed admirer.

Louisa, however, perceived nothing. One thought was always as much as she could cope with at a time, and her present thought was that Mr. Redwood had the previous evening appealed to her to rescue him from his loneliness.

'You will come to dine to-night, Mr. Redwood? Pray do. I had intended leaving a message at Inverashet. My father and Penelope are to leave us the day after to-morrow; we find the tide will suit for her to get off from the pier on Thursday, and no other day this week; and, of course, that is a great matter for an invalid, so these will be our last evenings all together.' She almost broke down. 'We shall be so glad if you will come both evenings. It — it will help us to bear them.'

'Of course, you must know I am only too glad to come,' said he.

Penelope durst not meet his eyes as he spoke. He was leaning over the carriage door, too close, too unguarded. He was not even making a pretence of looking beyond herself.

'While dear papa is away we cannot, of course, invite a gentleman,' continued the elderly young lady, with a gentle blush on her maiden cheek, 'but as soon as he returns, which will be in less than a week, you will always be welcome.'

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He thanked her courteously. Then he placed Penelope's ptarmigan on her lap.

'Are both of them for me?' said she.

Both? He smiled. Was not all he had to be thenceforth hers?

'So you will come to-night?' concluded Miss Carnoustie, leaning back on her cushions again; 'you know our hour. And, oh, Mr. Redwood, you will not mind, I am sure, but the Misses Soutter are coming. We asked them to dinner,' she concluded, solemnly; 'Penelope wished it.' And to herself she added, 'If dear mamma never did so herself, we feel sure dear mamma had some good reason. But dear mamma would certainly think we ought to do whatever Penelope wishes, now.'

The following day was Penelope's last at Carnoustie Castle.

How terrible and yet how dear had its grey towers become!

But a few short months previously she had stepped on that island shore a free-spirited, whole-hearted girl, eager as a child to grasp the burden of the future, desirous of nothing more than to plunge head foremost into the mystery of life. And now!

Ah, well; no other spot on earth would ever be to her what this place of places had grown to be; no other woods and moorlands would ever have such weird minglings of association, such surpassingly sweet and bitter memories! She would fain have visited every nook and tenderly inflamed, as youth will, agitation and emotion with the sight; but happily this could not be, and, indeed, all who loved Penelope and valued her peace of mind were now, with the exception of the old lord who was somewhat testy on the subject, intent on hastening her departure, confident that change of scene and companionship alone could effect the full restoration of her powers, and make her all she once had been in health and strength.

Even Redwood was eager that there should be no delay.

On the slightest of pretexts, however, he contrived to keep close and closer to the side of his love as the hour of separation approached; and she could not but be conscious of a watch thus kept, a solicitude thus manifested; albeit to the general view, Mr. Redwood was merely evincing a becoming concern for the welfare of an invalid whom everyone was petting.

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Redwood it was who suggested this and that precaution, planned this and that convenience; Redwood who had noted the gradual rise of the barometer, and marked the precise state of the tide. Redwood could give accurate information about the hour when the steamboat might be expected to touch at the quay.

As he made the latter announcement the attention of the party chanced by good hap to be diverted, and Penelope alone caught the quick undertone, 'You won't forbid my being there?'

Of course, she could not 'forbid' his being anywhere.

Indeed her own spirit was beginning to experience a sense of desolation, a yearning for his presence and support, a strange tenderness towards the wild fevered dream — it seemed at times but a dream — whence she had just emerged, but which so soon must begin to fade into the past. Too gladly would she leave it behind; and yet!

But if Redwood — and then it seemed as if Redwood intuitively divined the meaning of her pensive brow. He was fondling on her lap the little curly-haired puppy he had brought as a gift, which was to accompany its new mistress south the next day. 'He will have forgotten all about me before — ahem! — he sees me again. Dogs of this age have such *very* short memories,' looking seriously into Penelope's face. 'You will have an opportunity of seeing for yourself how *extraordinarily* short this little pup's memory is, *very soon*.'

Louisa and Joanna, who were both standing by, heard nothing in the words, but Penelope heard all she wanted.

Again, it was, 'You are going straight on to London without stopping, Lord Carnoustie? I shall do the same *next week*. I am going up either Monday or Tuesday. Oh yes, I am returning to Inverashet; I shall be here till the end of January at any rate, but I shall have to go up and down to town. That's nothing. One travels so easily nowadays.'

At last he had to take leave. He put off as long as he could, stayed as late as he dared, and almost betrayed himself at the last. But though he had to drive home through the night mists without the lover's 'good-night,' for which his heart hungered, and which by circumstances was denied, he was in his hidden soul, content.

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For Redwood was now fully, deeply, and lastingly in love. He had found in the bright fearless spirit of Penelope the true match for his own soberer self; he had learned to value her innocent gaiety, to care for every note in her voice, every sparkle in her eye; and each moment spent in her society only left him more and more impatient for the time when all barriers between them should be removed.

He desired not only to share every mutual retrospect, but to confide his own individual past, — to smile and sigh over it — to feel what a fool he had been, and to feel afresh what a lucky and a happy fellow he was.

All of this had to be reserved for the hour to which certain murmured syllables pointed, when on the little steamer's deck two figures stood apart from the rest, and two hands lay fast in each other. 'Goodbye,' whispered one voice, 'Till we meet again,' responded the other.

. . . . . .

It was not till the early days of spring that news came to the old castle in the north of the approaching marriage of Redwood and Penelope.

Throughout the previous months not a syllable had escaped to betray any understanding which should wound the hearts of its inmates, and by April one and all were prepared not only to hear with equanimity of the engagement, but to applaud it.

'It is what we have been hoping for ever since our dear Mina's death,' exclaimed Louisa and Joanna, going themselves with the news to Glenmore. 'We felt that, as all other hopes had been put an end to, it was by no means unlikely that Mr. Redwood would turn his thoughts towards Penelope. He seemed very much struck with her on her first appearance after her illness. We both observed that he could hardly keep his eyes off her. And when we heard he had been to visit them in London, and did not think Penelope looked at all strong, and was so much concerned about it, and ran down to see her at Brighton on purpose to set our minds at ease, we could not but fancy he was rather glad of the excuse. From the first he seemed to take to us all. Evidently he wished to enter our family. And now that dear mamma is so much better, we have been able to

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tell her, and though she does not *quite* understand it, she is just as pleased as if she did. We think, you know,' lowering her tone, and looking round, 'that sometimes dear mamma confuses Penelope with — with Mina. When we told her about Penelope going away at first, she talked a great deal about it, and at last we found out what she was thinking; and now she keeps harping on some old days — you know what days, Miss Jean? — and wonders what Lady Ainslie will say? And though it sounds quite coherent and sensible, we know by other things, little things she lets fall, that she is referring to poor Mina and Mr. Etheridge, not to Penelope and Mr. Redwood.'

'I suppose there never was anything between Captain Ainslie and — ahem?' inquired Miss Jean, as carelessly as she could, but she listened with outstretched ears for the reply.

'Never. Oh dear, no!' Louisa laughed at the idea. 'Indeed, Penelope would never have thrown herself away on that little Bob,' subjoined she; and if Bob could have heard her, he would have felt he had sunk low indeed. Even the gentle Louisa was to be contemptuous, now that she could dare to be anything. 'But then dear mamma always despised him,' she excused herself, internally.

Little Bob, however, had his good points. He was never known to say a hard word of Penelope East, nor to add her name to those on the roll of his vanquished fair ones. 'She was a very nice girl,' was the only comment he was ever heard to let fall.

Lord Carnoustie had the greatest satisfaction in the match. So had the household generally — in proportion. So had the Misses Soutter — chuckling over John as they announced it.

Whether poor, fond, faithful nurse Ailsie would have been most pleased or saddened could never be known, for she did not live to see the day. Her heart had been broken, and she sank into her quiet grave with the first chill winds of spring.

When they expected the idiot Tosh to participate in the family rejoicings, Tosh, I regret to say, had forgotten who Redwood and Penelope were. He made the announcement, however, a peg on which to hang his own immediate concerns. 'Troth, an' I hope they'll be *warmer* than I am, then. I'm

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that cauld this time o' year; an' there's nae Mistress Alison to look after me noo,' shivering and chattering, whereupon of course he received orders to go indoors, which was what he wanted.

But when John Soutter heard of the marriage settlement which had been made upon the bride, he was rueful enough.

'To think,' he cried, 'that all that siller might have gone into the coffers of the Ainslies!'

'It was no fault of mine that it didn't, then,' averred Dr. McWhinnock, considering himself aggrieved by the insinuation. 'I'm sure I kept that loon lying on his back, weeks after he could have been up and stravagin' over the whole country side — and all to please you, John Soutter!'

THE END.

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